

F.R. BUCKLEY--RED IS THE BLADE

15¢



JULY

# Adventure

**WHO PLUGGED  
WHICKERBILL?**

*by* **HENRY  
HERBERT KNIBBS**

**R. H. WATKINS**

**LUKE SHORT**

**L. T. WHITE**

**W. M. RAINE**

JULY

ADVENTURE



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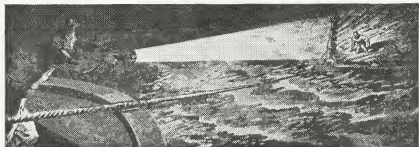
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# Adventure

(Registered U. S. Patent Office)



Vol. 103, No. 3

for  
July, 1940

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Howard V. L. Bloomfield, Editor

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# LOST TRAILS

Guy C. Pinney, Conneautville, Pa., R.D. 4, wants word of his son Roscoe Clarence Pinney, who left Sheridan, Wyo., in 1919 or 1920. He enlisted in the 81st Battalion Canadian Expeditionary Force, Sept. 1916, served in the First Brigade Co. F.A., France, discharged July 12, 1919. Five ft. 11 in. tall, fair, blue eyes, now 43 years old, left-handed. Last heard from in Santa Barbara, Calif.

George Richardson, woolsorter—served apprenticeship at "Willey's" in England. Came to So. Barre, Mass., in 1924, returned to England, went to New Zealand, Tasmania and Australia. Last heard from him at South Melbourne, Victoria, March 2, 1931, was leaving within a week for Broken Hill, New South Wales. Word appreciated by Carle Fossett, P.O. Box 264, Barre, Mass.

Joseph William Baldwin, last heard of in Detroit, Dec., 1920, reared in Rochester, N. Y.; age, 42. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Clyde W. Cook, 54 Davis St., Bradford, McKean Co., Penna.

Jack Bailey, erstwhile adventurer and soldier of fortune, please communicate with your old partner from San Jose, Calif., Chet (Piute Kid) Moore, c/o Adventure Magazine.

I would like to contact any members of C.C.C. Co. 885, stationed at Chandler, Okla., and Gillette, Wyo. Leon Rainwater, 818-17 Street, N.W., Washington, D. C.

Would like to get in touch with Albert McAuley who left Port Glasgow, Scotland, about 1923 for Canada. Bert Copley, 11741 Steel Ave., Detroit, Mich.

Fourth annual convention and reunion of former sailors and marines of the U.S.S. Connecticut. Open to all who served at any time either as officers or enlisted men aboard the Conne.—Oct. 19, Philadelphia. Further information by writing Fayette N. Knight, Nat. Capt., Nat'l Assn. of U.S.S. Connecticut Vets., Box 487, Closter, New Jersey.

Wanted information of whereabouts of Alex Heida, last seen in Scottsbluff, Neb., in 1933 or 1934. L. F. Campbell, 107 West 7th Street, Muscatine, Iowa.

Will James E. Turner, formerly Sergeant 16th Co. C.A.D., Fort Mills, P.I., later (1918-19) at Vladivostok, Siberia, communicate with his old friends: 1: Johnnie Dawson, 1600 California, San Francisco, Cal.; 2: Deemus, 1915 Fox Hills Drive, Los Angeles, Cal.; 3: Minnie X.Y.Z., 10634 Wellworth Ave., W. Los Angeles, Cal.? Turner was honorably discharged from Letterman Hospital, June 10th, 1920.

Desire contact General R. L. Hearn (LO SZE HAN) formerly Commander-in-Chief CHANG TSO LIN Manchurian Irregulars. "CAN DO! Everything 'DING HOW'." Address K. Hyde, Box 1731, San Francisco, California.

Marvin Arlington Harris, known to friends as Blackie or Sam Marvin, worked for Magnolia Petroleum Co., Dallas, Tex., from Oct. 1934, to Aug. 1935, as truck driver, worked for Joe D. Hughes, Inc., Houston, Texas, in December, 1938. He also has served in the army. Please notify his father, J. H. Harris, 316 East Gordon Drive, Decatur, Ala.

Wanted: Information concerning Charles Somcyock, veteran World War in the 4th Company located at Fort Slocum. From 1920 to 1926 was a bus driver, having his own bus. My dad sold his bus for him on our farm near Newburgh, N. Y. Please communicate with Samuel J. Matychak, 42 North Cedar Street, Beacon, N. Y.

My uncle, Benjamin Hutchinson, who sailed from Vancouver, B. C., on S. S. Zealandia, Christmas, 1912, for Sydney, N. S. W., Australia, last known address, 462 High Street, West Maitland, Australia. May have moved to Newcastle nearby. Height, 6 ft. 2 in.; eyes, gray; hair, sandy; age, about 68. Write his nephew, Valentine Barber, P. O. Box 183, White Plains, N. Y.

Anxious to hear from old shipmates that have served aboard the U.S.S. ROCHESTER, U.S.S. SCORPION, U.S.S. DENEbola, U.S.S. DOBBIN, ships of the Destroyer Divisions, and those who have seen service with the old U.S. Naval Detachment in European and Turkish waters. C. S. Williams, ex-Yeoman 2c, U.S.N., 240 Atlantic Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Would like to hear from any descendants of John and Margaret Moore who left Tennessee about time of Civil War. Margaret was a Campbell before her marriage. She had three brothers, Philip, Alexander (called Sandy) and Daniel (called Short). J. T. Campbell, R. 2, Box 708, El Cajon, Calif.

De Witt L. Greene, born January 25th, 1888, in Illinois, son of W. J. Greene. Trying for 20 years to locate you. Write your sister, Georgia. Mrs. H. A. Wilson, R. 1, Box 68, Corcoran, California.

Would like to hear from R. E. Pullman & Anthony Cooper who were with me in California in 1919. William John Carson, 760 Pardella, Lemay, Mo.

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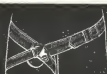
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"I discarded your Appliance about three months ago, having no further need for it. By that I mean I am perfectly cured and have no discomfort whatever after lifting pianos, etc., at my work."—G. Swindels, Long Beach, Miss.

#### "Brooks Works"

"I can't tell you how much I think of your trust. It sure has done me worlds of good. I have had work mining and so much lifting, but the trust held me and I was not bothered a bit with my rupture."—Joe Thomerelle, R. R. 2, Peoria, Ill., c/o Big Bear Coal Co.



# RED IS THE BLADE

A NOVELETTE

By F. R. BUCKLEY

*With no more sword knowledge than  
terror could give me in ten heart  
beats, I faced the bravo.*



**T**O THE Most Reverend Father in God, my Lord Bishop of Costecaldo; from Luigi Caradosso, sometime Captain of the Guard to His Grace the Duke of Rometia—and still under his protection, mark you—these:

Reverend My Lord:

The fact is, that blazonry doth not stand forth well from black velvet, and least to eyes as old as mine, and in the gloaming. That is why I write, instead of coming to Costecaldo with Your Lordship's inquisitors, to answer these charges of commerce with the devil.

Had I known that these two men were those officers who last week arrested my old friend Bertuccio Buca for some few idle words, of course I should have welcomed them with open arms; but, weeding my cabbages in the eventide and seeing two sable figures skulking (so to say) about my cottage, I knew no better than to think they were after my fowls.

Let not Your Reverence be alarmed for them, however; they are in good hands; indeed, already one of them hath recovered sufficiently to tell me whereof I stand accused—to wit, alliance with a witch, complicity in the sale of Andrea Bassano his soul to the devil, and connivance at the said Andrea's disappearance in a clap of thunder.

This is what comes of trying to be sociable with country-folk in their pot-houses, of striving to take their minds off their base condition and their general likeness to brute beasts. I doubt not that Bertuccio Buca was doing the like—he that led the right wing at Agnolol—and they have garbled him into a dungeon.

How much I have been belied Your Lordship shall now judge, starting from the point that (as the Prior shall certify Your Grace) I was brought up, a man of peace, in the convent of San Luca.

It was indeed from the cloister, or the lay-brothers' quarter thereof, that I entered on my military career, as servant to this Andrea Bassano aforesaid—a poor gentleman who, when I met him, was defending his life against four foul fellows with broadswords.

'Twas not so much that I cared

whether he lived or died, being then only eighteen years of age myself and less aware of life's value than I am now at eighty; but for long and very long I had yearned to fling vegetables at someone. And, having been marketing for the brethren and having a full basket with me, behold I must stop, fumble and let fly with a turnip, the which smote one of the assassins on the head.

As I had meant, but what followed astonished me.

For the fellow turned from his proper work of murdering Ser Andrea, uttered an oath which would set fire to Your Lordship's mitre and, sword in hand, came bounding across the cobblestones toward me.



I SPEAK of the year 1518, before they had widened all the streets at Pontevecchio; this was at the corner of the Via Tornabuoni, where now they have the grand new inn. At that time, there was naught there but a little armorer's shop; whose master, by God's grace, was standing in his doorway at that moment, watching the fight while he burnished the handle of a rapier.

Had he been at his bench instead of thus taking the sunshine, I should have been a blessed angel sixty-two years come next Easter; as it was, I snatched the blade out of his hands and, with no more sword-knowledge than terror could give me in ten heart-beats, I faced this oncoming bravo.

Ah, Ignorance, what a power art thou in this world; greater than thy sister, Malice! For he rushed at me with his point held exactly according to the rules of art, his eyes on mine yet taking in my blade-position—all most proper, I can see him now; and then what must I do but jump aside, swing my rapier as a farmer swings a flail, and cleave the poor clever fellow to the eyebrows!

It was so quick done that I could not credit it, stood gaping at him in his lake of blood, unbelieving he was dead. There were women in the street, and as I write I hear them—screaming, chattering, but most of them telling me to aid the poor gentleman, go to the rescue, kill again.

None of them chanced to have borne

the man I'd just split, but I was not old enow to consider such matters. Nay; pushed from behind by a fat woman with a moustache, I waved my stolen sword, gave a yell and went headlong into the fray.

Other things beside the fat woman were pushing me, Your Reverence; Fate, a certain wild swelling of the heart—ha! I laugh at myself. Luigi Caradosso hewing away in a street brawl! Beardless, garbed as a lay brother—I used to sing in the choir. Ahime!

Well, by this time Messer Andrea had put paid to one of his assailants, but the other twain had moved to take him from two angles. He had his back to a wall, and he was near death. 'Twas only a shout from one bravo, seeing me approach, that saved him, because the other, turning his eye, let his point wander an inch past Andrea's throat. And before he could recover himself I had run him through from side to side till my hilt thumped on his ribs.

Your Lordship will see that of novices I was the most crass. When Messer Andrea, at almost this same moment, gave his man two inches of blade-tip, I thought he had missed his stroke. And was amazed when the fellow dropped his sword, clapped both hands to the wound, choked and fell dead. I was looking at the *colpo di Bentivoglio*—just past the breastbone and into the heart, and very beautifully executed too, had I but known it.

Messer Andrea puffed a breath of relief, picked up the dead man's cap, wiped his sword on it and smiled at me.

At which same moment, a hoarse voice in mine ear demanded who was to pay for the rapier. The city watch had come at last—too late, as ever—and my old armorer, horn glasses askew on his nose, was calling on the sergeant to arrest me for theft.

"Taxes such as I pay!" he kept shouting. "Fifty years I've been in business, and may not stand in mine own door—"

I had been robbed too, it seemed. Eager for my life, I had dropped my great basket; the vegetables had been scattered and trampled, whereas of the fruits that could be eaten out of hand Your Grace may imagine the urchins

had left but few. And we had a sub-prior, God rest him—well—

The watch-sergeant was turning the dead bravos over with his foot.

"Giuseppe Borgo," says he of the one I'd spitted. And clicked his tongue. "Dodged the rope after all. Well!"

"Piero Adelanti over by the shop, Sergeant," says one of the men.

"Is't indeed?" says the officer, looked at Messer Andrea and touched his helmet. He did not salute because, though noble dressed, the young man was notably shabby. I have made the same distinction myself. "These be old friends of ours, messire. 'St been gambling, eh?"

"They had cogg'd dice," says Andrea.

"Well, of course," says the sergeant, reasonably. "Your Worship must be from the country."

Andrea flushed and became very obviously the gentleman, for all his plume was broke-backed.

"I come from two years at the Court of Naples," says he in a certain voice, "and if there is to be an inquisition—"

"God forbid!" says the sergeant. "But—"

"—I may be found at my late father's house at Rinaldo by Cartresi, which I go to inherit. Furthermore, I will not be bothered for a month, because I go to be married. Andrea Bassano is my name. Is that enough?"

The sergeant did salute now, and gave a humble grin.

"Your Excellency would be dicing for some little gift for the lady, no doubt—"

"Is that thine affair?" Andrea was beginning, when the old armorer came to the fore again.

"What of my sword?" he demanded. "My good sword, all to be re-scoured, and the engraving chipped, as like as not—"

I said naught, but I considered—what of my home, now? Our sub-prior—they had never been able to teach me to sing from music, and now I had done two slayings and lost the vegetables—

It may certify Your Grace what manner of man was Andrea Bassano that with a smile and two gestures he satisfied everyone.

First he tugged the sword from its red sheath in that bravo; squinted at it, and



flung the old armorer a price that made him bow.

Then he handed the blade to me and smiled at all around us.

And then he put his arm about my shoulders, patted with his hand and said: "Come with me, boy."

## II



IT appeared, as we rode thence (for my new master talked to me almost like an equal) that yon sergeant of the watch had guessed well.

Andrea's father, born to a wasted estate in the Sign of the Crab, had spent his life living up to his nativity, sending the very sons of his body to far courts to save the expense of 'em.

Hence this eldest (none of the others ever came back) was agog to return to his home in splendor, especially on account of his betrothed, Elisabetta. Her family was even poorer than his; indeed, orphaned, she had had to go live at his home. And he had had visions of taking her some piece of goldsmithery or a jewel; that was why he had gambled in Pontevecchio. Now he had bethought him that to have an armed servant would suffice, whence his spending of his last *scudi* on that sword and the horse he had bought for me.

I had heard love scorned such fripperies, but he laughed and said I had not been to court.

"Hath the Madonna Elisabetta?" I asked, upon which he became grave and said no, thank God.

"Her court hath been her parents and mine, and since they died her old nurse that wanted to be an actor."

"An actor?" says I. "Like a man?"

"Even so. One of the village girls, but all she became was wet nurse to my lady. Whom therefore she hath kept from all knowledge of the world—a very dragon."

I could not follow these wherefores at that age, ha ha! So we rode on in silence for some yards.

"But the girl lives not who'd not rather have a man come prancing than walking," says Andrea, and I could tell he'd had the proverb from someone else.

"Here's a flat piece by the roadside, Luigi; we'll have a lesson of fence."

So there under a mulberry tree in the bright sunlight he gave me my first lesson in the trade I was to ply so long—taught me that *colpo di Bentivoglio*, first ever I knew that had a name to it. And to think that for forty years one of the best has been named after me—the cut at the neck vein, just above the gorget. Your Reverence may know; it hath figured in a many confessions.

Once, after the battle of Ostense it was, I rode past that tree again, and Bertuccio Bucca (the same Your Lordship has in the dungeon) wondered why I halted the troop and crossed myself. Ahime!

Well, to return; we jogged on northward, out of the heat and into the spring-time, my master looking past all the flowering trees and the birds that were building nests therein, to a future when he should have replaced his family among the great ones of the countryside.

"There is a fall of water at Rinaldo," says he one day. "I used to sit above it all day with Madonna Elisabetta when we were children, and watch trouts she would never catch them, being too tender-hearted. I could build a mill there, take all the grain from the peasants about—'tis just a question of money to start. Then I have other plans, but oons! how to—What's this?"

Aye, just so it happened. Those are the very words he was saying, Your Reverence, when, like an evil star coming over the threshold of the night, there showed over a little hill ahead of us the gleam of a golden helmet.

And as we reined in and backed our horses to the grass at the side of the road—it was just by a little bridge—there topped the rise first a captain in half-armor; then a lieutenant and a sergeant riding just behind him; then a horse with no rider, but with armor slung across its saddle; then the files of a most black-avised cavalry troop.



WE watched them coming over the little hill till their leader was abreast of us, at which point he raised his arm. Beautifully disciplined they were, as I

know now; they stopped where their feet fell.

"'Morrow!" says the captain to my master, and smiled.

I have known a great many smilers in my time, Your Grace; I have seen men grin for lordship, for love, for terror; but never have I known one whose chops could drip such good will as those of Gianni Mola. Yes, it was he, though we knew it not; the same which had "The Enemy of Mercy" engraved on his breastplate—the motto was before us then, but so hidden among all sorts of masks and scrolls and flying Cupids that we could not see it.

Whereas that smile, with the snag-teeth, the twinkling blue eyes and the red nose in the middle of it, outshone the very sun.

If I have since said its owner was the devil—

"Your stream?" asks Gianni, waving his thumb at the rivulet under the bridge.

"Nay," says my master. "I'm but a poor country fellow on a journey. To Rinaldo."

"Ah, so?" says Gianni; raised his arm again and swung it toward the brook. In an instant, the troop was dismounted and leading its horses to the water.

I will tell Your Lordship now, since this is in some sense a confession, that they were the remains of that Spanish troop which had served Cesare Borgia—the widow-makers, they called themselves. This I did not know at the time, nor did I learn till long after what happened to the widows they had made. I sat there admiring their discipline and the sheen of their armor and the beauty of their mounts.

Gianni Mola took off his gold helm, swung from his horse, left it to a man who appeared at his stirrup and crossed the dusty road to us, still smiling.

"Lands about here, ha?" says he to my master in his deep voice. "Noble of these parts? Fine horse."

"He might drink," says Andrea, dismounting in his turn. "Luigi—"

I led the horses upstream, to the bank near the last man of the *condotta*. He was a squat fellow, I remember, almost as dark as a Moor; he squinted, more-

over, and his hands were covered with warts. He looked at me, craned his neck to see my master talking with Gianni Mola, said something in Spanish, at which his fellows laughed, and then came leering close to me.

He smelled very ill, and I shrank from him.

"Cartresa, eh?" he said, jerking at me with his finger. "Yes, Cartresa?"

Cartresa was a town nearby, I knew, but no concern of mine, so I shook my head.

The man leered more than ever.

"Yes, Cartresa!" says he, and was making gestures as of one who cuts his throat, when I heard my master calling me. I gave the leering man the bridles of the horses and hurried to the bridge, glad to get away.



ANDREA was in thick converse with Gianni, but looking doubtful.

"'Tis at thy choice," Mola was saying, "but devil fry me if I can imagine a young fellow refusing—a week's holiday, and home with fame and a pocketful of gold! But none ever offered to make *me* a lieutenant; nay, *my* commission had to be carved on my old hide."

Andrea's eyes wandered to the riderless horse and the armor thereon. They were very fine.

"And thou *art* commissioned—" says he.

"By the count? I'm hired, horse and man, and the guns I've got at Cartresa. Though to bring that town back to its senses is a duty, almost. Think on't—to revolt when his poor lordship is in a French prison."

"Ha?" says Andrea, and the captain's face changed.

"'Twas for his ransom he asked some few trifling taxes, which now I strive to collect for him. Is not his town his town?"

"But 'tis reduced already!" says Andrea, irresolute.

"As I say!" beams Mola. "Simply, there be contumacious rebels a couple score—the council and such ringleaders—cooped up in the citadel. But we'll have them out in no time, and—"

"If I go, Luigi must ride to Rinaldo," says Andrea, his eyes still on the horse and armor. "I—am expected."

"Well—" says Mola, and his eyes flickered; then he smiled again. "Well, so be it. But we can't wait for him. Let him rejoice thee at Cartresa, bringing back a mule for the plunder. Ha! I say plunder—ye know what I mean."

"Goods lying in the streets. Free for any. I could not have believed it."

"Free as air! Come and see. I was in Cartresa two days ago—just a little sally into the country, this is—and the rebels had run like rats, save for these graybeards in the old tower. Well, shall not an honest lad profit by what's forfeit anyhow? 'Tis for the lady's sake."

"She hath not much taste for gauds," says Andrea. The words spurted from him; he seemed surprised at them himself.

"Ah, but hast thou no taste for taking 'em to her?" smiles Gianni. "Wouldst not rather ride up in panoply, with this lad as squire—we can find him a suit of plate, I'll be bound—than trollop up with that feather wagglings?"

We had esteemed ourselves quite a gallant pair, just half an hour ago. Now my master smiled unsurely.

"Luigi—" says he.

"There!" cries Gianni Mola, clapping his hands. "I knew it! Tell me not I know not spirit from clay!"

"Thou knowest the way to my—my house," says Andrea; which indeed I did, having heard every inch on't described many times as we rode. "Hasten there, see Madonna Elisabetta—"

"And tell her the master will be home in a week, with a bale o' cloth o' gold," says Mola. "Eh?"

"So," says Andrea. "And then join me at Cartresa."

"He should be there and back in two days," says the captain, "unless he dawdles."

Mesecmed there was a strange flash in his blue eyes as he said that last word. If, sixty years later, I have told yokels I then saw hell-fire—well, Your Reverence is to judge.

There was but a moment of it; the eyes were smiling again as Gianni clapped my master on the back and



*Now I looked my first on the face of war.*

shouted for a man to bring a little keg of wine.

They offered me none, but I saw them drinking together as I breasted the rise of the hill. . . .

### III



SIR, that is all there was in the nature of a sale, of my master's soul or of any other commodity.

Not until I had ridden some miles toward the witchcraft and the clap of thunder also charged against me, did I begin to suspect that we had been dealing with the devil.

At a bend of the road just before a village—I could see the church-tower—there was a great flowering tree, very pretty against the blue sky; and, being young, I reined in to admire it.

There were birds twittering about, and a little warm breeze that made the grass fragrant, and if I was not thanking God for my youth I ought to have



been, when below the tree's cloud of blossom I perceived the bare feet of a man. In mid-air. Toeing in after the fashion of the hanged. And as I rode forward a little the rest of him came into view—a poor peasant fellow, his face purple, his eyes bulging and his poor hard hands forever limp against his thighs.

The breeze moved the branches and a shower of petals came down, Your Reverence, and in the midst of it—he started to spin. At the which my horse must have taken fright, because the next I remember is halting in the village.

Halting where the village had been, I should say, for it was there no longer. The roofs were off the houses—one does it with a grapnel and six horses, my lord, as I was to learn later; the windows were driven in; the doors, piled in the middle of the street, had burned until now they smoked just about as much as cottage chimneys at the time of the mid-day meal.

Only the church remained, and here was the parish priest without his hat, tottering from one to another of his parishioners as they lay strewn in the dust.

I asked him what had befallen, but I knew. I knew! Better than he could tell me; because though he spoke very calm and reasonably, he seemed in some sort to be asleep.

"There have been soldiers here, my son," says he. "A captain in a gold helm. Yes. Wanted money and—these—could not pay. Gianni Mola—"

He raised one arm toward the stricken village, like a scarecrow; gave a terrible cry:

"My flock! My little lambs!"

And sank down in the road and wept. I dismounted, but he would none of me; just lay there, his hands over his old face, moaning for those he'd baptised and wed and suchlike. So at last I rode on.

Now I looked my first on the face of war; that I was to know so much better, Heaven help me, than my mother's.

The first I saw was a square of ashes, where a hut had been; the Goodman was hanging from one of his fruit-trees and some soldier had amused himself by sticking a lance through his pig. It lay

in the middle of the road, and my horse shied at the smell of blood.

So did I.

Think of that!

There were other squares of ashes, and other dead men, and patches of feathers where heroes had plucked the dead men's fowls before carrying 'em off; and once I saw two women in a ditch, and would have spoken with them, but they screamed at me and then slobbered.

When at last I stopped to drink—for my mouth was very parched—my face in the water of the pool looked ten years older than I remembered it; indeed, I was young no more.



DESPITE which, I felt somewhat less than a man as I rode up to the manor-house of Rimaldo. It seemed impossible that the master of yon low-built, old-fashioned place should be off in the train of a murderer, a robber and a bandit, but, possible or not, 'twas not imaginable that I should bring the news to this lady Elisabetta. On the other hand—at the monastery, the brethren had been very strict about the truth—I had to halt there in sight of the house and think for quite a long time about an acceptable lie. And at the end, the best I could invent was a small attack of fever that had laid Andrea low for a day or so.

When I came into the lady's presence, even this poor tale hurt me in the telling, because she was, as it were, of a soft body; not armored against cruel news. I made the fever as little as ever I could, and blushed and stammered until she must have thought I had a touch thereof myself. But 'twas evident she loved my master some distance the other side of idolatry, and, as I say—

Not that she was beautiful, my lord; nor even pretty. She had kind eyes, though; a little woman.

"I'll go to him," says she. "Maria—"

An old hag came shuffling into the room; I wondered if this could be she that had wanted to be an actor, and as the lady turned, I caught the beldame's eye and shook my head. And winked.

Behold the witch of whom I stand accused!

At once she comprehended all seven

deadly sins and was full on my side. I have aye found those we call wicked to be very quick of comprehension, and have sometimes wondered why.

"Maria—" says the lady, all agitation. But the old dame would not hear her.

"Messer Andrea's ill, and you'd ride to cure him," says she, shaking a skinny claw. "Nay, I can still find a crack to listen at when there's a young man with your Ladyship, hee hee! Well, you'll not go with my good will, or at all, with Gianni Mola about the countryside!"

"Mention not that name in this house! And I will go!" says Elisabetta, stamping her foot.

"Indeed, lady—" I began, and she listened to me. Had I not come from Andrea?

"His Worship," says I, "is—hath—that is to say—"

"He hath a good leech, is on the mend, and would fret himself to flinders were my lady to wander the countryside for him. Eh?" says the old woman, winking to show she believed not a word of it.

I nodded, sweating.

"There!" says the duenna; and Elisabetta looked at me, undecided, tapping her foot.

"If Your Ladyship would write a letter," says I, "saying that he will be welcome home—"

Her face lighted up. She was one of those women who must be doing something, giving their hearts' blood, for choice.

"I will. Maria, pens and ink. Take this young man to the kitchen. Feed him well; he must start back tomorrow morning early."

"Tonight, an't please you," says I. Because, Your Reverence, I thought the less time my master had with Gianni Mola, the better, and also I had lost my taste for—scenery.

"Thou'rt a good servant," says Elisabetta. "Feed him well and quickly, Maria!"

Downstairs, the old woman gave me enough provender for a corporal's guard, and then froze my appetite by asking questions. It was her belief that Andrea had stopped by the wayside for some girl; and of this, with some talk about youth and wild oats, she did not disap-

prove. Only wanted to know whether the lady was dark or fair and all else about her, I stuffing myself with food as well as might be and holding grimly to my tale about the fever.

Such a pair of eyes as she fixed on me from t'other side of the table! Like red-hot gimlets.

"Might as well speak," says she. "All my care is to save her ladyship woe—'a's had enough lately, poor dove, with her cousin, God rest him, gone along of this Gianni Mola."

I could not help it; my mouth flew open and I felt myself go pale. Then I saw the blacks of that old witch's eyes widen; she half rose and a hand of bone gripped my wrist.

"A God's name, young man," she croaked, 'tell me not that he's—that Messer Andrea, *he* hath not listened—"

Mercifully, at that instant the lady's bell range above-stairs; I wrenched myself loose and appeared before her, panting. She must have wondered at my disorder. Maria was still lumbering up the stair. It was dusk by this time, and the lady had a candle on her table, but she had not yet sealed the letter—sat there with it in her hand and smiled at me.

"Luigi," she said, "I am to put something herein, which the winds might waft away were it opened. So I will read thee what is written. 'Good my lord—'"

"Lady—" I began, indignant that she should think me an ordinary servant.

"'Good my lord, recover well and come quickly to me. Meantime dream of the woods and the jays in their great disputes and troubles and the stream dashing over the fall, and "See, a fish, Andrea!"' That is all."

I was to be indignant still, but she kissed the words she had written; then sealed them up.

"Tell him of that," says she, handing me the billet. "And God speed thee, Luigi Caradosso."

#### IV



I WAS ruthless in escaping from the claws of old Maria, for what could she do (I asked myself) save mop and mow?

And I answered myself; nothing. And

rode so desperately forward in mine own conceit, that I missed the Cartresa road as often as I took it; 'twas evening again when I reached the gates of the city.

Since it lay conquered, these were open, but there was a double guard which examined me most strictly.

"Andrea Bassano? Why, that's the new—"

"The new lieutenant," says a sergeant.

"Quite so; the new lieutenant," says the officer, laughing. "And this is the new lieutenant's new servant, eh? Thy master's in the Palazzo Testoni, boy—at supper about now, I should think. Go hand his cup for him; he'll need it."

They all chuckled as I rode through the archway, and I thought perhaps they had given me wrong directions. But no; I reached the Palazzo Testoni through streets that seemed little damaged by the siege, considering; and there was Andrea, sure enough, sitting at a long table on the *piano nobile*, with perhaps a score of other officers, mostly bearded. There were three or four young men like my master, lacking whiskers and looking sad as moulted birds; but they sat mumchance at the foot of the table, whereas Andrea was well above the salt.

Gianni Mola was at the head of the board, half drunk. And how changed now was his geniality in mine eyes—in Andrea's too, methought; he looked pale and ill at ease.

"Ha! Baby's baby!" shouts Gianni at sight of me. "Hast brought a letter from mama?"

All at the table roared, save the beardless young officers, who grinned without mirth. My poor master flushed sudden scarlet, stared daggers at me—as though I'd be fool enow to hand him the billet in such company—and in growling wise bade me bring him wine.

"And quickly!" says he that was always so kind. "Thou'st dawdled enough by the way."

Gianni Mola, elbows on table, stared at him with the devil's own twinkle in his eye.

"As I was explaining," says he, "if the lieutenant can now take time from his love affairs—"

All but the sad young officers roared again.

"—there is a small work to be accomplished before we can take our repose. Certain wool-faced dodderers calling 'emselfs a council, or some such, have holed up in this citadel, with the city guard to make things awkward; and to put the matter plain, you, Ser Andrea, must get 'em out."

He rolled his glittering eyes around the table.

"These—wolves—have tried," says he, "and failed. Low blood's their trouble. Which of you all is a gentleman?"

There was silence, during which they looked at the table. Meseemed that through the beards I could see mouth- corners twitching; the young officers' lips just drooped.

"But I did not come to fight old men," says Andrea.

"Just for the loot, eh?" says Gianni Mola, and again the company roared. "Or is't that city guard that makes thee tender?"

Andrea got up, and I saw that the serving man standing behind him moved closer.

"If ye think I'm afraid—" His face was white.

"Nay, nay!" says Gianni. "And to prove it—I've a company of my best men, that served under Gabriel Perez, God rest him, ready for the assault to-morrow dawn. With a gentleman to follow, they'll make a flea-bite of yon citadel. We've blown the gate in."

He got up and clapped Andrea on the shoulder. The others rose, too. It was the end of supper.

"Thy girl shall be proud of thee," says Gianni in a low voice. "And see—knowing thy family, who knows but these burghers may not surrender at discretion?"

Andrea did not see, as I did, how he looked at the nearest officer and winked heavily.

"Now read thy love letter and sleep well. Come, children, we'll make a little patrol."

They went out, laughing among themselves and shepherding the sad young officers before them; and when they were in the street I heard another roar of merriment.





ANDREA stretched out his hand for the letter.

"Sir—" says I.

He clicked his fingers.

"I know," he said. "I know. What did she say?"

"I—I told her Your Worship had a fever. I thought—"

He took the letter.

"That was well done," says he heavily. "And no lie. Fever—"



"Is it surrender, then?" my captain demanded.

"The brethren used to say that to flee evil was no shame," says I.

He shook his head, broke the seal, read the letter twice or thrice over, judging by the time he took. Then he crumpled it all together and held it in his hand and went over to the window. It was dark outside by now—a blue night without stars, but with a red glow cast across its sky by houses that were burning, somewhere the other side of the town. Against this glow there stood forth the citadel, with its pointed tower and braziers burning on the battlements.

"Sir," I said, "if it may be pardoned: could we not ride—"

Andrea gave a short laugh.

Says he, "I am no coward."

Your Reverence will recall what the girl had said in that letter—"the jays in their great disputes and troubles, and the stream dashing over the fall—"

It was a far cry. . . .

"Luigi!" says my master suddenly.

"Aye, sir?"

"Wake me at dawn."

## V



I THOUGHT, there would be little sleep for him that night; there was none for me, quartered in a rheumy cellar with other officers' servants, mostly drunk. There was a torch sconced to one great pillar, and in its flare men gambled and cursed, all except one who sat on his pallet, hands around knees, waiting for the noise to cease. He was an old man, as I thought then—forty or so. He beckoned me over to him.

"Going with the master?" says he; meaning, to the attack. I said aye.

"Keep behind 'em," says he in a low voice. "Look, boy. These troops thy master's to lead are the same that ran away a week ago; this assault is their punishment. Tell thy master—lead 'em from behind."

"If they run again—" I began, but he laughed.

"They'll not dare run. See. Citadel's *here*; storming party must go up the market-square *here*—eh? Very well; Gianni will have cavalry in the side-streets and behind 'em, and guns to fire into their flanks if they retreat. Hark! There they go now."

From the street above our heads came indeed the sound of grinding wheels, the slow clop of hoofs, the cursing—

"There'll be but one safe place for your detachment—inside the citadel. And they'll care naught whose body they trample to get there. Tell thy master. He's green."

"Then why doth Gianni Mola give him such command?"

The old fellow looked at me, uncoupled his hands from his knees and stretched out.

"Nay," says he, staring at the groined vault. "As for *that*—"

He would say no more. Even when I

asked him, had those sad young officers been tried in high emprise and found wanting?—he was mum but for a chuckle.

My mind fumbled in a fog of puzzlement for two or three hours, until at last a finger of light came through the cellar-grating. I have not said it, I perceive, but the night before, a sergeant had issued me my armor, the first ever I wore; a sallet with a dent in it, and a hooked stomacher that laced behind.

"Good as new, too," he'd said. "Fellow that wore 'em got shot in the throat."

As I buckled myself in, the street was resounding with the tramp of infantry and the sharper sound of horsemen at the walk. Going upstairs to Andrea's quarters, I paused at a landing and looked out—the foot was our storming party going into position, guarded by cavalry, and hangdog and sullen as a convoy of condemned.

The guns that were to hold us to our duty, I could not see, but the lifting mist showed the citadel grimmer than it had loomed the night before. Its fires were out; it squatted there, with the smashed gate of its escante-wall gaping, like some old monster wounded not quite to death.

So did it fascinate me that I stood staring until Andrea's very hand fell on my shoulder, and I spun round to find him half-armored and trying to smile. At the head of the stairway stood two of the bearded officers, looking down on us and smiling without effort.

"Sir," says I, but he hushed me.

"Thou'rt late, Luigi. These gentlemen have been my tiring-maids. Go thou and polish the rest of my plate."

He started down the stairs, but I followed him.

"Under favor—"

"Go back!" says Andrea, through his teeth. "Go back, fool!"



HE WAS in no mood for argument, wherefore I kept at his heels without further protest.

When we reached the square, I did try to tell him what the man had said about leading the assault from the rear; but, Reverend Sir, he was past

listening. I think perhaps he was hearing those jays at their quarrels in the home woods, or the dash of that trout-brook over the weir.

At all events, 'twas at the head of the company he posted himself, and I took position behind him, hoping to form some kind of cushion for his body, perhaps.

Our front-rank men, I saw, glancing back, had ugly-looking hatchets to their hands, and they themselves looked uglier still. As for the cavalry, it was indeed drawn up in the side-streets, on either side of the path we must take to that damned gate. And at the head of the right flanking line sat Gianni Mola himself, on a white horse.

I was just craning my neck for a glimpse of those accursed guns, when Gianni raised his hand.

"*Avanti!*" shouted my master, and forward we went, jog-trotting and clanking across the cobble-stones.

How strange it seems now, that when of a sudden there was a cry and the clash of a man falling, I should have half-turned to see where he had slipped! I had seen a ring of smoke burgeon from the lower stage of the citadel, of course, but it had meant naught. Now I had a glimpse of this great fellow on his knees, his arms wide, toppling—I must look to my front lest I trip too—There was a droning noise over my head and someone further back began to shriek: "Ah-ah! Ah-ah! Mama!" he went, but this time I did not look back.

It was my first time under fire, Your Reverence; not until that soldier began screaming for his mother did I know where I was, and even then not fully. Because while I had met death close to, it seemed unbelievable that yon men in the tower should be shooting at us whom they knew not, of purpose to wound. I remember waving my sword with some idea of adjuring them, be careful!

Now the men behind me started to shout—it is a very good remedy against thinking. They all shouted, not words, but sounds such as animals make when they are hungry. And then we were at the citadel-gate. A great beam lay across its threshold, and on this beam there now appeared a gigantic man in full

armor, mowing with a two-handed sword.

My master, just ahead of me, checked in his stride as if to invite this figure to a parley or the like; he was loath to attack one who had done him no wrong, but the press of the storming-troop left him no choice. We were swept up to the giant on the beam, so quickly and so closely that he could not swing his sword and was borne down and trampled—and somebody kicked open his visor and stabbed him through the eye in passing; I saw him after.

For a moment, Andrea and I and the men-at-arms of the front ranks were woundy busy with two parties of defenders, one on either hand, that had been waiting just inside the gate. He who came first at me was a dwarfish fellow with a dagger in one hand and a bishop's whip in the other—that is a spiked iron ball on the end of a chain, Your Reverence, and a filthy tool it is to face a beginner withal. Not only will it curl over a man's guard and crack his skull but if the ball misses, the chain may writhe his sword out of grasp and leave him all naked for the dagger.

I never knew who saved me, but all of a sudden the dwarf was gone and there was a fellow about my own age, his face all pale and his eyes glaring, and I felt a horror that God's likeness should be so distorted, and slashed at it and it vanished.

What like my mine own face, could I have seen it?

Something hit me on the belly-plate; I looked down and there was a fellow, grounded already, stabbing upward with his last gasp; I was going to stamp on his forehead when an eddy of the struggle caught and swept me up against a wall and pinned me there.

Then there was a pig-grunt as someone drove his blade home, and a worse animal noise as someone received the same; and the press broke up and with half a dozen of our men I was running forward, while a score of Cartresans rushed at us.

I will explain to Your Lordship that this citadel was a tower with a wall about its base, that had had traverses and inward turrets and all such griefs

for besiegers; but when the count had ceased to live in the town itself, he had very wisely dismantled these defences. So that the defenders had had to bivouac in the open court, and now must fight us on even terms around the tower; and, sir, they were not up to it. Mostly they were the seniors of the city guard, fitter to cry the weather than to yell for blood—we went through the first score of them like a knife through cheese.

In the next rush, there was a kindly looking man, such as I have hoped my father was; I would have passed him by, but a sword licked past me and slew him; and next there was a youth with a halberd and I was hurled against him and ran him through.

All was blood and groans and confusion worse confounded. And then I found myself back at the gate by which we had entered, and our rear-rank men were picking up the great beam to use as a battering-ram.

The door of the citadel itself was now before us; but before they could bear their engine against it divers coping-stones came down from the battlements above and smashed two or three of the rammers as flat as flies. And from behind us, from the square, came the boom of fire as our arquebusiers tried to clear the enemy away from the parapet.



I DOUBT if I give Your Grace much picture of the scene; it passed before mine eyes like a nightmare. And I remember that when of a sudden the citadel door opened and there appeared a white-bearded man with his hand raised for peace, I was plentifully sick where I stood.

Well, the best lieutenant I had in after years—Bertuccio Bucca, now in Your Lordship's jail—used to come forth from the fray dripping with blood and sit down and put his face in his red hands and weep. It means naught; there be two men in all our skins, as Your Reverence knows, and sometimes the inner is better than the outer.

Howbeit, here stood this old man; he was the *podesta*, the head of the council, and he lacked teeth. His mouth was moreover dry because the citadel

had been waterless for three days, but he made his meaning clear. He denied the authority of Gianni Mola; he demanded that the town's case be appealed to the count, or, if he were still in his French prison, to the Council of Nobles.

Meantime, should all be spared if they surrender?

"Better have done it before," pants my master, looking around at the dead.

"I knew thy father," says the old man, and I heard one of our fellows chuckle. "But these with me—"

I wondered. . . .

"Is it surrender, then?" Andrea demanded.

"Shall we be spared? There be some fifty of us, and—"

"Am I a butcher?" snarls my master. "Look what thou'st done already!"

He pointed at the bloody puddles aside the beam, and the old man wagged his white beard sadly.

"I knew thy father. The rest would not trust any man of Mola's, but I knew thy father—" he was mumbling as he came down the steps. After him came two or three women, and I remember, there was a child. I have tried to forget, but there was a child.

Then men, dirty and haggard and with their right hands powder-blackened. . . .

One of Gianni Mola's officers came in through the gateway; he was a captain, and took rank of Andrea.

"Very thriftily done!" says he, grinning; and then to those defenders: "Come, citizens, a little order! Form two and two. *Avanti*, old man! Forward toward yon gentleman on the white horse."

"They yielded on conditions," said my master.

"Gianni will condition 'em," says the wolf-captain. "Forward, friends!"

And forward they went, Your Reverence.



AT THE gate, one woman shrank back, and the captain slapped her on the back and pushed her onward and laughed; and so they went, until all were clear of the citadel, stumbling toward Gianni Mola down their market-square.

O God! O God!

The infantry of the wolf-captain closed in behind them, between them and us, but over the morions I saw Gianni raise his hand. And then I saw cavalry coming out of one of the side streets at the trot.

So did Andrea, and I heard him gasp. There was a flash as the horsemen drew swords, and then my master was hurling himself at the soldiers at the gate.

I followed him; the wolf-captain grabbed for my shoulder—he was laughing loudly now. And then we were in some sort of struggle, the soldiers wedging us back.

That cavalry, those iron men on those steel-girt horses, they were riding them down, Your Reverence; the old men and the brave fighters and the women and children as well, riding into that pitiful column and cutting down those they did not trample! There would be no appeal to the Council of Nobles.

Andrea was shouting, struggling to get through to those cries that were coming from the square; I too was doing my best, until a hand seized me by the scruff of the neck and pulled me away.

It was that captain, and in his other hand he held that bishop's whip. With this he smote Andrea on the back of the helmet with a clang like the gates of hell.

My master slipped across the backplate of a soldier and lay flat.

## VI



IT WAS not back to the Plazzo that they took us; nay, thenceforth we were to be quartered in a baker's house in a side street—"so that the woman

could cook for us", the wolf-captain said.

But there was no woman there, no baker either, no fire in the oven—nothing; and of the few neighbors left in that street not one would help us. Starving as that long, hot day wore on, I yet dared not leave my master, because, though unconscious of the present world, he was still very active in the siege of the citadel. Every hour or so, he would spring up from the pallet I'd contrived for him and go rushing toward door or window with staring eye, shouting "Nay, nay—the women!" as he had when the cavalry rode down those prisoners.

I would not, if I could, have asked Gianni Mola for aid; and of all his host, not one came near us until the eventide, when Andrea seemed to have dropped into a natural sleep.

Then there sauntered into that sultry room the old soldier who had talked with me the night before. He came upstairs with his thumbs in his waistbelt, chewing a straw; stood looking at my master for some moments, then beckoned me out to the stairhead.

"Well, younker," says he, "'tis done, eh?"

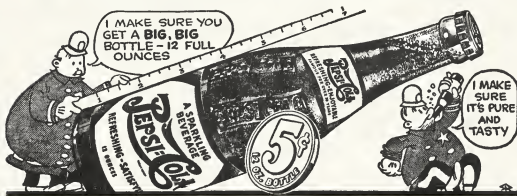
He took a thumb from his belt and yerked me in the ribs.

"Get him away from here as soon as may be. 'A's in great danger."

I said nay, he was greatly better. The veteran stared at me.

"Look'ee, lad," he said; paused undecided, then spat out his straw.

"Look'ee," says he again, as though explaining a matter to an idiot. Gianni Mola's done with thy master, finished





with him. He hath served his purpose. Now—"

"Served his purpose?" says I, puzzled.

"Just so. Taken the blame for yon massacre. Why else was he recruited, think you? We've had a dozen such gulls—got two or three of 'em hanging around yet."

"But in God's name," says I, my spine freezing, "my master gave no such order—"

"Nor did none of 'em. Bless ye, 'tis ever the same. Folk trust their word—Gianni breaks it, and they get the blame. Clears his skirts, muzzles the council o' nobles, and gets Mola free officers, such as they are.

"Ye see, they can't go home. The tale about your master's all o'er the countryside by now—how he lost his head, troops got out o' hand—"

"Tis a foul lie!"

My stomach seemed to have sunk away from me.

"Try to catch up with it," says the man, moving to the stair. He looked back. "But mark you, this is the worst we've done yet; Gianni may have to chop someone for't, to satisfy the nobles. And 'a's lord of this town now. Take thy master as soon as he can ride or walk, and begone."

He nodded at me, winked and went, whistling that old song:

*Quanto è bella giovinezza  
Che si fugge tuttavia!  
Chi vuol esser lieto, sia;  
Di doman non c'è certezza.*

Free translation of the Italian verse,

*Youth is such a lovely thing!  
But its moments fleet away.  
Ah, rejoice in your today—  
Who knows what the daven may bring?*  
Lorenzo de' Medici

Youth did not seem very beautiful at that moment, as I went back and sat by the side of my poor master; and certes the morrow seemed uncertain at the best.

Being young, nevertheless, I tried to plan for it. I sat there as the evening grew hotter and darker with the promise of storm (we are coming to the thunder-

clap, Your Reverence!)—racking my brains for a way out of that room, that city, that horror.

As if it were mine to design!



ABOUT vespers, Andrea moved on his pallet and groaned; and when he opened his eyes, I could see—there was just light enow—that there was reason in them. He knew me again, smiled and tried to raise his head.

"Where am I?" he asked, in a croak very different from his shouts of the earlier day. "I seem to have been dreaming—"

And then he knew; hurled himself up-sitting.

"Luigi—"

The room was lit by a blue glare and from far away there came the rumble of thunder.

"Those men and women—those in the citadel—where are they?"

He was not quite himself, as Your Reverence may see, so I swallowed what was in my throat and told him all was well with them now.

"Now—" he said, as if puzzled. And then he shouted again. "'Twas true! The cavalry! The cavalry rode them down! The horses—"

He would get to his feet, almost as strong as he had been in the height of his delirium.

"Who gave the order?" he cried. "I promised! I gave my word! I am dishonored—"

There was another roll of thunder, closer, and I recall wondering, as we stood there, why I had not seen its lightning.

But light seemed to be coming up the stairway, which was quite dark now; red, flickering light such as is cast by a torch.

Andrea staggered, his hand to his head, and leaned against the wall; and when I turned and saw what he had seen my own scalp crinkled and I crossed myself.

But there were no demons in this matter at all; only that old woman servant of Madonna Elisabetta; looking, it is true, exceeding like a witch. Behind her, holding the torch and with his eye-

yolks bulging out of a ring of white, stood a farm-servant dripping with rain.

"Maria!" says my master, dazed-like, and she bobbed him a curtesy.

"Good even, Ser Andrea. Your humble servant," says she in a sort of singing way.

Andrea went over and shook her shoulder.

"Madonna Elisabetta! Is she well? Has aught happened?"

"Did ever good news travel as fast as we have done? How many hours, Jacopo?"

"Four," says the farm-hand huskily.

"The courier had taken but three," chants the old woman, "that came to tell of Your Worship's victory."

There was a great roll of thunder now and she put her hand to her head.

"There were two men that came," she mumbled on, "and says my lady, 'What,' says she, 'my Andrea gone too, fighting for Gianni Mola and killing the poor folk? Why, he always loved them. I must think about this,' says she, 'down by the river, alone.' So the afterwards old Maria went to look for her—"

"Where is she?" shouts Andrea. "Speak, you old—"

"Where?" says the erone, "why, where should she be? In Heaven, I suppose. *She* never killed any little children."

The farm-hand behind her panto-nimed that she was mad, but 'twas Andrea I must watch. He stood staring at the hag as she mumbled to herself, nodding his head a little and tapping his fingers on his breast.

At last:

"She had ever a soft heart," says he to himself most reasonably, "and when she heard this, she'd go to persuade herself 'twas false—to our rock by the river. That's where she'd sit and her heart would fail and she'd slip into the water. Aye. That would be the way on't."

He stood there for a little longer, then licked his lips.

"Master—" I whined, for I knew what was to do.

He walked over to the corner where our harness had been flung, and slowly took therefrom his naked sword. He



*My Andrea stooped for the fallen stiletto and with it hurled himself on his enemy.*

walked to the door, saying naught; disregarding altogether the old witch and her link-man, he went down the stair. And they followed him, leaving me to fumble in pitch-dark for mine own weapons.



BY THE time I caught up with him he was alone, stalking through torrents of water toward the citadel. I had known where he'd be going, but the rain must have put the hind's torch out and then the old woman was infirm, so they had lost him. I trotted alongside, pleading with him as the lightnings showed me his set face and the bare blade he carried in his hand.

He had on just the shirt and doublet he had worn in bed, Your Reverence, and I remember imploring him to return and put on clothes more suited to a visit. A visit!

All the little shops and houses were dark. Already the hand of Gianni Mola was heavy on the town; no citizens in the streets—and as we turned the corner into the square of the citadel, of course we must run into the curfew-patrol, who cried and crossed halberds around us.

I thought Andrea would fight, but he made no move. And the patrol-sergeant, seeing who he was, seemed at a loss.

"Servant, sir," says he; and I could watch him wondering whether Andrea was still to be treated as an officer or arrested like a citizen. "Sir, you should be in your quarters."

"Where is Gianni Mola?"

"Well, 'a's in the citadel," says the sergeant. "Feasting the—the capture, your Honor. Orders are to take any found wandering there to him directly."

"Take me," says Andrea.

"Well," says the sergeant, relieved, "if that's Your Honor's wish—Pagolo! Luca! Escort the lieutenant."

But Gianni Mola knew why we had come.

Indeed I was astonished, because he seemed to be awaiting us; but since, I have learned by serving divers noble lords that tyrants must perforce see in all who pass their doors the probable avengers of blood.

This is one of the drawbacks to being a tyrant, Your Reverence. I do not think the advantages make up for it.

Gianni was at the height of his advantage as he sat there at the head of his board, captains about him and the lordship of that city in his hand; he was feasting in the hall where his victims must have huddled ere they surrendered to our good faith and his mercy.

It was a vaulted room, the width and length of the tower; it had three trestle tables in it, and over these flared a profusion of torches ranged around the walls. The air was thick with their smoke, and when the lightning would blaze outside shafts of blue light would strike across the chamber from the arrow-slits, like Heaven's arrows flying at wicked men. Then would come the thunder, so close overhead that it shook the very thickness of the walls and made the flagstones tremble under our feet.

Gianni, as we entered with our guard,

was holding up a flagon and shouting in derision of the thunder, as a man will on a runaway horse. I think he was a little drunk, but less on wine than with success, and he sobered very quickly when he saw my master in the doorway.

One of the guards stepped forward and saluted, and would have told him why we were there; but, as I have said, he knew. He waved the man aside, fixed his eyes on Andrea Bassano and, as the young man advanced toward his table, smiled upon him more broadly than ever before.

A silence fell as the folk at the trestles turned to follow Gianni's gaze. Only the wolf-captain spoke; very drunk, he arose in his place with a cry "Well, 'tis my young crack-poll!"—but a gesture of the hand of the commander stopped him.

Between the door and the board at which Gianni sat, on a seat higher than the rest, there was an open space that might be twenty ells by ten, with tables on three sides of it. And in the middle of this space my master halted, the water pouring off his clothes and off mine as I stood by him; and he said to Gianni Mola:

"Come forth!"

Gianni put down the flagon and laid his chin in his hand. It was to be seen that various things were passing through his mind—a multitude, and all bad. First he opened his mouth to say something honeyed; then he prepared a mockery, and kept it to himself; then he let his smile die, closed his mouth like a trap and stood up.

A dart of blue light flashed through a window and fell on him. He was standing in his place, holding out his right hand to the soldier who stood behind him. All the time he looked my master straight in the eyes. The thunder rolled. The soldier put his sword in his hand; Gianni wrenched his dagger out of his belt, put the hand that held it on the table and vaulted over.

Now he smiled again and advanced some few paces toward Andrea, dragging the sword behind him as a child drags a toy.

"Come for thy bale of loot?" says Gianni, and Andrea took a quick step forward.

While yet he was taking it, Gianni was out of his furred robe. Sword and dagger came through the sleeves; the finery fell at his feet and he kicked it away; and there he stood in leather doublet and hose of deerskin, knees bowed out and his points up and down. Aye, in a flash he was the fighting man, not smiling any more, but grinning, with his upper teeth to be seen.

"I'd meant to have thy head off," says he, "for treachery, but—"

Without shifting his eyes, he sent down a most treacherous cut that could have caught my master on the knee and hamstringed him—but did not.

The wolf-captain vaulted over the table and came staggering, sword in hand, toward me. Gianni, on guard again, turned the tail of his eye to him and made a head gesture—"Aye; wipe him away; have done with him"—which I took ill, Your Reverence, having studied the *colpo di Bentivoglio* as I had. Also it misled the wolf-captain, so that he came rushing to hew me down without thought for his breastbone those

bare three fingers above its fork. . . .  
He died looking very amazed.



I THOUGHT another would arise to deal with me, but none offered. They sat fascinated.

Gianni was circling my master, crouching lower, as he found he had a swordsman to deal with, and carding the air with his dagger as a cat cards her bed. On the other hand, his sword-point was as steady as the Pole Star and wavered not even when there came a clap of thunder as though all God's artillery had fired.

Some of the men at the tables bolted up and crossed themselves.

He only licked his lips and grinned and awaited the end of the interruption.

"We'll discipline thy boy afterwards," says he.

While he spoke, Andrea was upon him with a shower of cuts and thrusts mixed past the ability of my prentice eye to follow; but Gianni made as it were a glittering *loggia* of his own blade, and all

For shaves that look right up to par,  
Those Thin Gillettes are best by far!  
They whisk through beard in record time—  
And four blades cost you just a dime!

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THIN  
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BLADES  
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fell harmlessly to one side or the other.

And with the hand that held his dagger he now scratched the side of his neck as though it itched!

Sir, the time was to come when I should face a young man filled with wrongs, and to his fire and passion oppose my dreary learning in the tricks of the soldier's trade. Worse, I have had to watch the hope and faith and belief in scores of young bodies brought to naught by day-laborers working those machines called cannon.

But at that time, mescemed 'twas a fault in the universe that this man with such ill in his heart should also have such skill in his sword; being young, and what with the lightning and the thunder and his grin and the red torchlight, I may indeed have thought about the devil. . .

Round and round each other they circled for a little; then my master was in with a tremendous attack, foiled again, and followed by a viper-thrust from Gianni which came within a hairs-breadth of the sword-arm. Nowadays I know that the great fighter is he who avoids death by the least margin and purveys it by the same; but then my mind was all full of the pictures in the books at the monastery (those I had not been allowed to read) and I was all for leaping and slashing and roaring, like a child.

Fights for the life are not so; for minute after minute these twain prowled about each other like panthers, so silently that when the blades were not in clash I could hear the rain outside; a torrent, which the lightning at the arrow-slits lit up so that it seemed we were in a city under the sea.

And the chill of the deep was beginning to touch my heart, Your Grace; because as Andrea attacked twice and Gianni twice repelled him easily, mescemed this fight might have an evil end. My master was the younger, but he had just risen from a bed; moreover the youth that gave him fire, denied him knowledge. All the attacking had been his; his forehead glistened and he was tiring. Mola was wearing him down, down, till his wrist should weaken.

Meantime he mocked him, to bring more attacks:

"Somewhat behind the times," says he, "their sword-play at the Court of Naples."

Andrea did not respond with an assault. He was panting.

"Better have stayed there than come butchering my citizens."

"Ye lie!" shouts my poor master, and drove forward. Into the trap that had been laid for him, for in an instant Gianni had stooped low, risen as the lunge passed him and sent in that *rin-verso tondo* which cuts out both the eyes.



IT MISSED, by God's grace, its very aim; but it scored a furrow across Andrea's brows from which the blood began to trickle blindingly down. With his free hand he wiped it away, but it was no use. He tried to force a rally, but Gianni danced out of reach, laughing aloud now, and gathering his shoulders for the death-blow.

But he must take his pleasure just a little longer, first.

"Thou'd have done better—" says Mola—

Another peal of thunder.

"—to take they loot—haha!—"

He withstood a pitiful wild attack in *terza*.

"—and go fence with thy lady-love."

In the saying of which and the pointing of it with a lunge in prime, he erred, Your Reverence. Because the lunge missed and at the word about Elisabetta, Andrea Bassano was seized by a madness.

In an instant he forgot all his swordsmanship, all those tricks he had learned to slay enemies withal, forgot even his sword and his gentleness and became a tortured savage with a club.

Which is not provided for in the science of sword-fighting, Your Reverence—I mean, whoever could think of an adversary abandoning guard and slashing at one's mouth?

Not Gianni Mola, and Andrea Bassano, with a sort of sob, did leave his whole breast open and slash at those grinning lips. And the tip of his blade got home. I saw teeth fly—Gianni's grin widened itself to a hand's breadth and



his beard dripped blood. He gave a shout that bubbled—his tongue had been cut too, most like—and for the moment flinched. And as he flinched, the sword fell on his dagger-wrist, so that the knife rang on the stones.

Gianni was of the old school, out of balance without the dagger; with it gone, he was a target for the sword. But my pretty Andrea now was impatient of such distance. While a gasp rose from the men at the tables, he flung his sword away, stooped for the fallen stiletto, and with it hurled himself on his enemy.

Ah! I was young, I had lost no woman, but I felt the pulse of that assault; the body to the body, the flesh under the hand! Gianni Mola's blade passed under my mother's arm; Andrea reached forward and seized that devil's beard, pulled him into close embrace and stabbed him. Stabbed him and stabbed him again; fell with him to the flagstones and rolled over, wielding that short blade in a sort of ecstasy.

Gianni's hand went up and gripped his wrist, but he tore it clear and drove in the dagger again; and as he did so, there was a flash of light that brought the thunder with it—inside the very room, it seemed; and then Gianni Mola's voice arose in one long, despairing yell that gurgled as it ended.

Then there was silence; save for Andrea's heavy breathing as he staggered to his feet.

He stood up, and threw the dagger down on Gianni's corpse, and his eyes sought the sad young officers.

"You're free now," he gasped. "Be-gone!"

But they moved not. None moved. There should have been a pack upon us, but all sat there staring as if turned to stone; petrified.

And they were staring, not at their dead leader where he lay in his gore; not at us either, but at the doorway; in which (I turned and stood petrified myself) stood that old woman Maria.

Drenched to the skin, her gray locks like snakes on her forehead, her eyes blazing, one skinny hand upraised and the other pointing a finger at the assemblage—not a man there but thought her a witch.

And now she spoke; in a muttering sort of voice at first, then more loudly and at the last in a scream.

With that outstretched finger she seemed to hook every man in that hall and draw him to her; and in that terrible cracked voice she cursed them every one, if so be they should lay another finger on that city or that countryside. She cursed them in standing up and lying down, ahorse and afoot, in waking and sleeping, in eating and drinking; she blasted their loves and blessed their hatreds; she withered them and their children and their children's children to time and to eternity—unless by morning light they should have taken their troops and vanished forever from Car-tresa.

Most of it was in the name of more saints than ever I heard of; they sat and listened like so many men carved in stone; but at the end she cursed them in the name of the widows and the fatherless, shrieking. And then whispered:

"May their tears rise up and drown ye!"

—and I saw them break.

There was a dead silence.

She pointed her finger at my master.

"Come you with me," she said; and as she backed out of the doorway, he followed her.

And so did I, leaving that hall-full of ruffians frozen in their chairs.

And as we went down the stair, there was indeed a very great flash of lightning and a clap of thunder to match; and for the benefit of the peasantry, Your Reverence, I have been accustomed to leave the tale there, because they like marvels. I have not even told how the *condottieri* fled, or how the count came back from his French prison much chastened—what did they care?



RATHER than be burned, though, I will now add that at the foot of the stair, when we were past the guard which shrank from her, old Maria halted in the light of a wall-brazier, pushed back the hair from her face and demanded had she not done well.

And when we shrank from her in turn, she burst into a wild laugh.

"Ye believed it!" she jeered. "And that Madonna Elisabetta was drowned too, as like as not! Hee hee hee!"

Andrea seized her by the arm with such a grip that she was bruised for weeks afterwards; she showed me.

"Is't not so?" he demanded.

"Is't likely that I'd let such news get to her? If thou'rt fool enow to pawn thy soul to Gianni Mola, I'm wise for the three of us. Should I not have been an actor? Hee hee!"

She peered up at Andrea and wiped his bloody forehead gently with her hand.

"I made the courier drunk and sent him on his way. I'm all he saw, boy—and now thou'st redeemed thyself. We can go home. . . . And *let's* go home, 'a God's name—am I a fish?"

So that is whither he disappeared, Your Reverence; Andrea Bassano that killed the great, the very great Gianni Mola—not to the devil at all, but to that stream of his where the trouts were, and to the girl who never knew him save as a hero.

And if he had risked his soul therefore, after all it was in the way of life; to take pretty things to his woman, albeit she knew better than to want 'em.

I can see them now, kneeling together on the stream-bank, looking down into the water at those fishes.

I might have stayed there too at Rinaldo, and been steward in a furred gown; but which of us hath not, according to his measure, sold his birthright for a mess of pottage? There was a village wench that admired soldiers, so I joined a passing troop and there was no witch to set me free; so I worked the will of princes for fifty years.

And now I have forgot the girl's name.

'Twas not one to stick in an old memory like (for instance) the name of that young priest I met in the Romagna one time we campaigned there; he was bandaging a Muslim man that had been among the Spaniards, and when I told him nay, this was an infidel, he looked at me and asked did not God make him too? So I inquired his name, and a queer one it was—Benvenuto, Father Welcome.

Yet who knows? Even he may have changed; become a Bishop, maybe; given up his gentle ways for some such barren thing as a mitre and become very stern, not only to infidels

But also toward poor old Christian soldiers cackling of their great days

Such as

With all humility,

Your Lordship's Reverence's humble penitent servant,

L. Caradosso.

## ENDORSEMENTS:

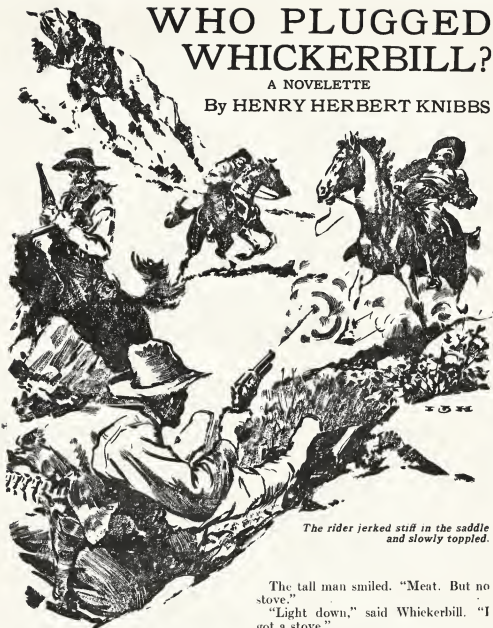
*Arrest this old blasphem  
To be further examin  
Acquitted*

*Benvenuto.  
(SEAL)  
Costecaldi*

# WHO PLUGGED WHICKERBILL?

A NOVELETTE

By HENRY HERBERT KNIBBS



*The rider jerked stiff in the saddle and slowly toppled.*

STRANGERS were usually regarded with suspicion in the Blue Range, but when the tall man on the big horse rode into the cabin clearing where Whickerbill Stevens was chopping wood for his supper fire, Whickerbill was merely curious. His glance slipped from the stranger's rugged face to the saddle with its low cantle, the maguey stake rope and the heavy spurs. There was a two-prong buck tied back of the saddle.

The tall man smiled. "Meat. But no stove."

"Light down," said Whickerbill. "I got a stove."

After supper Whickerbill remarked casually that he had plenty of blankets, wasn't expecting company, and that a man had to eat and sleep, no matter where he was.

"Well, I'm here," chuckled the tall man. "And seein' you've got your legs crossed, I'll wash up the dishes."

The following day, after an early breakfast, Whickerbill reached his rifle down from the pegs.

"Somebody tore my fence down, over at Big Spring," he explained. "I reckon I'll go mend it."

"I've seen considerable fence mended with a Winchester," said the tall man. "But it was kind of hard on the cowhands. 'If you ain't in a hurry, I'll side you.'"

They had been working on the damaged fence for some time when three riders appeared on the distant wagon road north of Big Spring. Following a long survey of the horsemen, Whickerbill said, "Friends of yours?"

"Not this morning." The tall man untied his horse and disappeared in the shadowy timberlands.

Whickerbill nodded to himself and went back to work. A few minutes later, Sheriff Collins of Bowdry, was talking to him.

That evening the tall man again appeared at Whickerbill's cabin. He accepted Whickerbill's invitation to have some deer meat.

The tall man didn't seem at all surprised when, after supper, Whickerbill told him that Sheriff Collins had interviewed him.

"First off," said Whickerbill, "I told the sheriff I was the biggest liar this side of California. He kind of laid his ears back and says he's looking for a man by the name of Tonto Charley." There was a twinkle in Whickerbill's eyes when he said, "I told Collins I'd heard plenty about Tonto Charley, but I'd never seen him, that I knew of."

"Must be somethin' wrong with your eyes," chuckled the tall man. "Or mebby the lamp needs trimmin'."

"The sheriff," declared Whickerbill, "ain't left the mountain yet. If you figure to bush out this evening, help yourself to blankets."

"Good idea," said the tall man. "I'll fetch 'em back sometime tomorrow."



THE following afternoon Whickerbill was sitting in the cabin doorway, smoking his pipe and wondering if Tonto Charley would return that evening, when Wirt Spence rode into the clearing. He stepped off his horse and came up to the doorway. Whickerbill antici-

pated trouble, but greeted Spence cordially.

For years the Spence brothers had run cattle in the Blue Range. They begrudged grazing rights and water to the more recent settlers. Whickerbill, a comparative late comer, had shown his independence by fencing Big Spring for his own use.

Wirt Spence wasted no time in formalities. "You done fenced in Big Spring. We-all was using that section before you ever seen these mountains."

"The government survey shows Big Spring is on my land."

"To hell with the survey! I'm here to tell you you'll pull that fence or git out of the mountains."

Originally from Texas, the gaunt Whickerbill's eyes grew hot, but he kept his temper. "Now see here, Wirt, I got my rights. But I don't aim to crowd nobody. Come in and set down and we'll talk it over reasonable like."

"I done my talking."

The showdown, which Whickerbill had anticipated after mending the damaged fence, had come. It had caught him unprepared.

"You're packing a six-shooter," he said, watching the other man's eyes. "My Winchester is in the cabin. If you got guts enough to wait till I get it, we'll settle this here without any more talk."

"Go get it," said Spence with a hard laugh. "I'll wait."

Whickerbill suspected treachery, but he had no choice. He rose to enter the cabin. Spence fired before Whickerbill had turned to step in. Spence's gun was poised for a second shot. But the lank homesteader was down. His body twitched, became motionless.

With a glance round about, Spence caught up his horse and spurred across the clearing.

Returning to the cabin shortly after sunset, Tonto Charley stumbled over the body of Whickerbill lying face down in the doorway. Whickerbill had been hit hard but was still alive. Tonto Charley roped out two of Whickerbill's brones and hitched them to the buckboard. With the wounded man on a cushion of meadow hay, Tonto drove down the long mountain road that led to Bowdry.

Doc Holliday rose reluctantly from a game of checkers with the liveryman when told that someone outside wanted to see him. He waddled across the street to where a buckboard team was tied to a telegraph pole.

"Hell, Charley," he said as he recognized Tonto, "don't you know better than to show yourself in Bowdry?"

"That'll keep." Tonto Charley gestured toward the long shape under the tarp. "It's Whickerbill Stevens. He's shot up kind of bad."

Holliday shrugged. There was a feud going on up in The Blue Range—the Spence brothers and the settlers. He asked no questions.

"Whickerbill done me a good turn, recent," said Tonto. "Can you get him in the railroad hospital and try to fix him up?"

"I can. But there'll be inquiries."

"Ain't you runnin' the hospital?" Tonto drawled.

"All right," said Holliday. "I'll fix it so nobody will bother Whickerbill, if there's anything left of him to bother. You get out of town before there's more trouble."

Whickerbill was registered as a tramp picked up near the railroad tracks. Name unknown.

When Holliday finally came out of the hospital he was surprised to find Tonto Charley still waiting.

"Damn you, Charley," growled Holliday, "haven't you got any sense?"

"How's Whickerbill?"

"Can't say, yet. He's got a chance."

"That's all I was waitin' for," said Tonto Charley. He spoke to the team. The brones took the buckboard round the corner on two wheels. When they struck the mesa north of town they were going on the dead run, and Tonto Charley was singing at the top of his voice.

Holliday, who liked Tonto, shook his head. Some folks declared that Tonto Charley was a chuckle-headed fool. Others knew him as good natured, reckless yet mighty shrewd. When drunk or in one of his black moods, not even his friends could do anything with him. Relieved that Tonto Charley was sober, and had left town, Holliday returned to the checker game.



THE morning following his wild drive back to Whickerbill's cabin, Tonto Charley took time to size up the situation. The cabin was well stocked with provisions. There was meadow hay for his horse. Inquisitive neighbors were few and far between. The Spence ranch, however, adjoined Whickerbill's. Tonto Charley knew the Spence boys. They wouldn't make him any trouble unless they thought he was looking after Whickerbill's interests. Their stock had watered at Big Spring until Whickerbill fenced it. Surmising that they had pulled the fence as a warning, it wasn't hard to believe that one of them had shot him.

Because of Whickerbill's unsolicited friendship, Tonto felt in debt to the lank homesteader. He was in the hospital. It would be weeks before he would get back, if he pulled through. Meanwhile there was no one to look after his stock and belongings.

If he pulled through! Now there was an idea.

A peculiar smile on his rugged face, Tonto Charley selected a clear space back of the cabin, and dug a trench about six feet long. He turned the loose earth back into the trench and rounded it over neatly. It looked, he told himself, like a first class grave. Having invested an idea in a hole in the ground, Tonto decided to make it pay dividends.

With yesterday's track of Wirt Spence's horse as an inducement to visit the Spence ranch, Tonto Charley saddled up and rode toward The Notch. About noon he arrived at the big gate. Stepping down from his horse to open the gate, Tonto noted that up on the cabin porch a man with a Winchester across his arm stood watching him. It was some time later that Tonto appreciated the reason for this exceptional vigilance.

Stocky, slow moving, with a curly brown beard and eyes like dull blue marbles, Ed Spence, eldest of the three brothers, nodded curtly as Tonto Charley rode up. A few minutes later Bill and Wirt Spence came up from the corrals. Bill Spence, a dried up copy of his brother Ed, glanced curiously at Tonto, and went into the cabin. Unlike the others,



Wirt Spence had a narrow, high colored face and a sandy moustache.

"Hello, Charley!" he said, shaking hands with Tonto, "we ain't got drunk together for a dog's age."

"That's right," said Tonto, grinning. "I remember the dog."

"Come on in. Bill is rustling grub."



RIFLES, chaps, slickers, hung on the walls of the long, low ceilinged room. The windows were curtainless and grimy. The hearth of the huge stone fireplace was littered with stubs of brown paper cigarettes, ashes and bits of charred wood. When Old Man Spence and his wife were alive, the spacious cabin, Tonto recollected, had been a comfortable and tidy home. Now it was not much more than a hangout for three shiftless mountain men.

Wirt Spence fetched a bottle of whiskey from the kitchen.

"How's the climate down around Bowdry?" he asked Tonto in an offhand manner that didn't deceive Tonto any.

"Couldn't say. I been too busy watching where my horse put his feet."

"Collins was up here a couple of days ago," stated Wirt Spence. "Looks like he was a mite ahead of time."

"It sure does," chuckled Tonto, playing along with Spence, yet thinking of Whickerbill Stevens.

They were sitting at the long table, talking, when Bill Spence, wearing a flour sack apron, came from the kitchen, picked up the whiskey bottle, sat down and made a cigarette.

"Polite son-of-a-gun, ain't he?" said Wirt. "He wouldn't take the trouble to tell us grub is ready."

During the meal, Ed Spence asked Tonto if he had met anyone on his way up. Tonto said that depended on which way you called up. His apparent hesitancy suggested that he wished to avoid the subject. To the contrary, he wished to continue it.

"Didn't meet anybody," he said finally. "But yesterday evenin' I run onto somethin' kind of queer."

On his way to the kitchen, Bill Spence paused and stood listening. Wirt Spence glanced at Ed.

Tonto Charley didn't miss any of this. "Last evenin'," he said, "I was figurin' to hit your cabin afore dark, when I come to a clearin' a piece south of Big Spring. Next thing, I seen a fella layin' belly down on the ground." Tonto leaned back in his chair and curled a cigarette. Bill Spence went on into the kitchen. "I thought he was drunk," said Tonto. He blew a cloud of cigarette smoke. "But he was deader'n hell."

The rattle of dishes in the kitchen ceased. Making a cigarette, Wirt Spence spilled the tobacco.

"Got lockjaw?" he said finally, a crooked smile on his lean face.

"Me? Hell, no! I was just wonderin' who he was."

"Sounds like Whickerbill Stevens' lay-out. What did he look like?"

Tonto described Whickerbill.

Ed Spence nodded. "Ever since he come into the mountains he's been making trouble for his neighbors. Next off, somebody'll find him. That'll mean more trouble."

"That's what I figured," said Tonto Charley. "So I just locates me a shovel, and plants him."

"Charley," laughed Wirt Spence, "you're the biggest liar in Bowdry County."

"Make it Arizona, Wirt. I ain't no piker."

Seemingly not satisfied with Tonto Charley's story, Ed Spence said, "That was yesterday evenin'?"

"Yesterday evenin'."

"You say you planted him, and bushed at his cabin last night?"

"Seen' it's you, that's where I bushed."

"And you came direct up here from Stevens' cabin this mornin'?"

Leaning sideways, his head on his hand, Tonto Charley was sketching invisible patterns on the table with a match. Wirt Spence glanced at the guns and belts on the pegs along the wall. Ed was pig-headed. If he kept on digging into Tonto, somebody would get hurt.

"Hell!" blurted Wirt Spence. "We-all don't give a damn who plugged Whickerbill."

The match in Tonto's fingers stopped moving. "If you are tryin' to figure out

I plugged Whickerbill Stevens, you better do the rest of your talkin' over a gun."

"Over a drink, you mean," said Wirt Spence. "Hey, Bill, what did you do with the whiskey?"

Bill Spence appeared in the kitchen doorway. He held a Winchester carbine levelled on Tonto Charley.

"Want it?" he said grimly.

"Not out of that barrel."

Ed and Wirt rose and buckled on their guns. Tonto knew they wouldn't hesitate to shoot him down if they thought he suspected them of having killed the lank homesteader. He reasoned that it would be to his immediate advantage to act as if he thought they suspected him of the killing. In any case, they would try to hang it onto him if the trail got too hot.



UP against three of the toughest men in The Blue Range, Tonto played his final card.

He had no actual proof that one of them had shot Whickerbill. And a gun fight, even if he came out of it alive, wouldn't prove anything. With an abrupt change of manner Tonto said, "You're a hell of a bunch of friends, tryin' to hang that killin' onto me!"

"We don't give a damn about that," said Wirt Spence. "But Collins was smelling around here a couple of days ago. And you saying you planted Whickerbill and bushed at his cabin last evening sure sounds kind of funny."

"Bill," Ed Spence gestured toward his brother, "go saddle up and ride down and take a look. We'll entertain Tonto till you get back."

Tonto heard Bill Spence shuffle down to the corrals. Aware that Ed and Wirt were still suspicious of his intentions, he decided to set them at ease. "You boys got me wrong. I come up here, figurin' to hide out a spell. If I tangled with that fella Stevens, that's my business. What I mean—you ain't got no call to ride me into the fence."

"Forget it!" laughed Wirt Spence, easily.

About a half hour later, while they were sitting out on the porch, Bill Spence limped up from the corrals. He nodded to Wirt. "I was down there. Whickerbill is planted, all right."

The confirmation of Tonto's story eased the tension. But it was apparent the Spence brothers still mistrusted him. It was in their eyes. There was something more to it than the shooting of Whickerbill.

As for that, Tonto had noted that Bill Spence had reported to Wirt, although it was Ed Spence who had sent him down to Whickerbill's cabin.

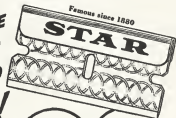
Stepping down from the porch, Tonto Charley untied his horse.

"See you later," he said, as if they had just had a friendly talk. When he dismounted to open the big gate the Spence boys were still standing on the porch, watching him off the ranch. That, in itself was too significant to be overlooked.

About an hour later Tonto Charley was lying on a distant ridge from where he could see the cabin and corrals. Several horses were milling round the heavily timbered breaking corral. A rope flickered. A horse was dragged down, branded, turned loose. The work went on. Presently the bars were dropped.



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**STAR**  
WAY TO  
SHAVE!



**STAR**

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LARGEST SELLING  
SINGLE EDGE BLADE

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**10¢**

12 for  
**25¢**

and the horses were turned loose to range the mountain meadow.

The Spence brothers were at their old game, picking up a small bunch of horses at a time, running their brand on them and turning them loose as their own stock. This had happened more than once. The Blue Range settlers had complained to the sheriff. But lacking proof other than the settlers' word for it, Collins had made no effort to apprehend the horse thieves. It was an old book to Tonto Charley. He knew every page of it.

He was riding through the timber near Big Spring when he ran across a bunch of startled horses. As they wheeled and high tailed it, he caught a glimpse of a raw shoulder brand. Whickerbill hadn't been gone three days, and the Spence brothers had started to clean him out. Tonto decided that something ought to be done about it.

A light rain had set in when Tonto Charley arrived at Whickerbill's cabin. He hung a blanket over the window and lighted the lamp. He made a fire and cooked a meal. Rain pattered on the roof, and a gust of wind set the door latch chattering.

It was a right neat cabin, tidy as an old maid's trunk. Tonto rose reluctantly from eating supper. He reached Whickerbill's slicker down from a peg. He wouldn't take Monte. Monte was due for a rest. One of Whickerbill's buckboard team would do.



A BACHELOR by preference, Sheriff Collins occupied a room in the old Bowdry House. No meals were served, and there was no bar. Consequently the sheriff spent most of his evenings in the Silver Dollar Saloon. This evening it was raining. With the prospect of a good night's sleep, which the sheriff needed, he took a final drink with Doc Holliday, and made for the Bowdry House.

Short and broad, with a heavy featured, red face and too much waistline, Sheriff Collins puffed up the uncarpeted stairs, entered his room and locked the door. He struck a match and adjusted the lamp wick. Shaking the rain from his hat, he tossed it onto the bed. He un-

buckled his gun belt and was about to hang it onto the bed post when he heard the faint clink of metal. He swung around. In front of the corner curtain which concealed his spare garments stood a tall man in a black slicker.

"You won't need that gun," said the tall man.

Sheriff Collins felt as if he had been punched in the stomach. Tonto Charley, whom he had been after for years, was in the room. How had he managed to get in? The door had been locked. What did he want? A sudden chill ran up the sheriff's back. Undoubtedly this was his finish. Reluctantly Collins hung belt and gun on the bed post. He knew he couldn't out-shoot Tonto Charley. Tonto was too fast.

Tonto Charley grinned. "The shed roof was kind of wet and slick. But I made it. It was rainin', so I shut the window."

"Thanks!" The sheriff's tone was decidedly sarcastic.

Tonto's voice took on an edge. "Sit down! And don't monkey with the lamp."

Collins slumped into a chair.

"Take it easy, Jake," said Tonto. "I didn't come to knock your ears down." Tonto swung a chair around, straddling it, and faced Collins.

Two ideas chased each other through the sheriff's mind—find out what Tonto Charley was up to, and get out of this mess alive. He took a cigar from his vest.

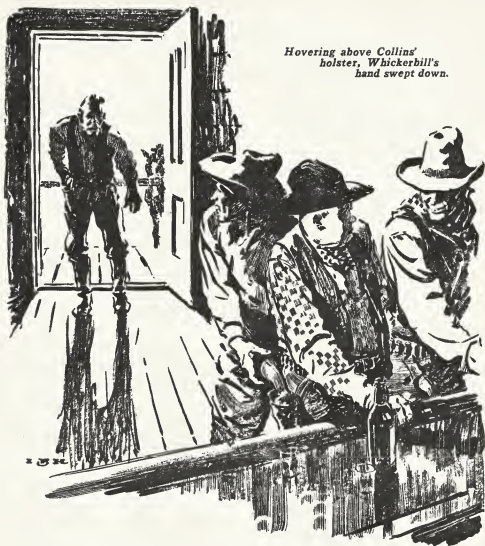
"Go ahead, Charley," he said. "You got the cards."

"And she's a straight deck."

Tonto Charley's first card came as a big surprise. "Whickerbill Stevens is in the railroad hospital. One of the Spence boys put a slug through him."

Collins bit down on his cigar, which still remained unlighted. "Whickerbill! Now I was talking with Doc Holliday this evening. He didn't say anything—"

"That's Doc's long suit. A couple of days after Whickerbill got it, the Spence outfit started in brandin' his ponies. Next off, I started a little graveyard back of Whickerbill's cabin. Whickerbill is planted, till he gets out of the hospital."



*Hovering above Collins' holster, Whickerbill's hand swept down.*

Sheriff Collins sat up. "Charley, you're drunk!"

"Well, it's a sure bet you're sober. The Spence boys think Whickerbill is dead. What I mean, they didn't monkey with his stock till he fenced in Big Spring. Then they figured they had a good excuse to bump him off. Bein' nobody around to look after his spread, stealin' his horses would be easy."

"I was up at the Spence ranch—" Collins began when a knock sounded on the door. The sheriff glanced at Tonto, who was fingering the top button of his open slicker.

"It's Jack," came the voice of one of Collins' deputies. "I just heard that Tonto Charley was in town. I been lookin' around—"

"Keep on looking. If you locate him, let me know."

The sound of footsteps died away. Tonto Charley chuckled. "You saved the county one deputy and two funerals, Jake. You ought to get a rake-off on that."

Tonto's tone changed. "Right now I'm bushin' at Whickerbill's cabin, it bein' handy to the Spence ranch."

Collins let out a deep breath. Things

were getting pretty thick. And the hell of it was a man never could outguess Tonto Charley.

"The Spence boys," stated Tonto, "are gettin' all fixed to run off a bunch of Whickerbill's ponies."

"So you say. But Whickerbill hasn't lodged a complaint."

"How the hell could he?" Tonto Charley's eyes were blank, his tone grave. "Listen careful, Jake. Whickerbill is on his back in the hospital. I'm reppin' for him. I didn't come here to make a bluff. I got what you fellas call his power of attorney right here under my arm. And I reckon you better take my word for it."



AS Sheriff Collins chewed the end of his dead cigar, he had a vision of himself standing on one foot, all ready to wing his way to heaven. Preferring to stay on earth, he said quickly, "Hold on a minute!"

"You got a watch," said Tonto. "Now here's the layout. Ed and Bill Spence are hard to put down. And Wirt would shoot you in the back if he got a chance. You ain't yearnin' a dam' bit to tangle with 'em. But the papers been diggin' into you about a bunch of Blue Range horse thieves, and you would sure like to see 'em cleaned up afore next election."

"You got that right," said Collins. "But where do you come into it?"

"About three jumps ahead of you. What I mean, if you ain't goin' after 'em, I am."

Sheriff Collins frowned. "Meaning you want me to lay off you. That's a pretty big order."

"I ain't gunnin' for you. All I want is a break."

Sheriff Collins knew that if anybody in Bowdry County could round up the Spence boys, it was Tonto Charley. Given a free hand, Tonto would do the job. And there was always the chance that Tonto Charley would get bumped off tackling the Spence outfit. That in itself would clean the sheriff's slate of considerable trouble. Collins thought he saw his way out of a difficult situation. He thumped the table. "By God, I'll swear you in as a deputy and turn you loose to round 'em up!"

"I didn't figure I was tied, any," said Tonto, watching the sheriff's face. "About that deputy business, it might come in handy."

Collins, Tonto knew, was an old hand at the game of politics. And he played mighty good poker. He might stick to his argument. Then, again, he might change his mind. Tonto decided to fix it so the sheriff couldn't change his mind. He rose. "It's a deal. Get into your coat, Jake."

Collins' face went blank. "Coat? What's the idea?"

"It's rainin'," said Tonto.

There was considerable silent speculation by late customers of The Silver Dollar when Sheriff Collins and Tonto Charley walked up to the bar, and stood talking and drinking amiably. It didn't seem reasonable.

Collins himself appreciated Tonto's clever move in putting him on record with the public. Their appearance as friends was a seal on the temporary contract. But there was another angle to it. The news was bound to reach the Spence brothers. They would infer that the sheriff was back of Tonto Charley, had the law with him. Evidently Tonto was missing no bets in preparing to clean up the horse thieves.

After the fourth drink the sheriff said speculatively, "Suppose the Spence boys was to get you, Charley?"

"You had that chance all figured out back there in the room," said Tonto. "So did I. But I ain't lettin' it interfere with my pleasure drinkin'. I'll take the same."

In Bowdry the following week, Bill Spence bought a few supplies, and kept his ears open. No one in town said anything to him about Whickerbill's disappearance. That seemed strange. None of the Spence brothers had seen Tonto Charley since his visit to the ranch. But when Bill Spence heard that Tonto Charley and the sheriff had been seen in The Silver Dollar, hobnobbing like old friends, Spence's ears came up.

Bill Spence rode home by way of Whickerbill's ranch.

The cabin door was closed. No smoke came from the chimney. There were no horses in the corral. Evidently Tonto



Charley was away somewhere or had abandoned the place. Spence peered through the sunset shadows. The smooth mound that had marked Whickerbill's grave was now a ragged pile of earth heaped beside an empty hole. Spence drew a swift conclusion. Tonto Charley had talked with the sheriff. Collins had had the body removed to Bowdry. Queer that no one had said anything about it. Bill Spence cursed Wirt for a fool. Wirt should have waylaid Whickerbill back in the hills somewhere. Now there would be hell to pay!

Dust was settling when Bill Spence reached Big Spring. Here he got another surprise. The water pen was down, the timbers strewn round about. Already a definite arrangement had been made with Al Pierce, north of The Notch, to take the stolen horses. It had been easy to trap them in the water pen, keep them bunched and handle them. Now they could get to water whenever they wanted to, and take back into the hills. This meant a lot of extra work rounding them up for the drive.

Spence reached for the dipper on a nail in the tree that shadowed Big Spring. As he unhooked it, the dipper jumped from his hand with a spang and fell to the ground. Before the echo of the shot had died away, Spence was spurring for cover.

From behind a giant spruce he stood watching the space around the water pen until it was a blur in the dusk. Wondering why the man who had so neatly plugged the dipper had chosen to miss him, Spence pushed cautiously on toward the ranch.

Not until he heard the faint creak of saddle leather and the soft plodding of hoofs in the dusk did Tonto Charley leave his ambush near the spring. And then he made for Powderhorn Ridge, far to the west.

When taking to the hills to avoid Collins and his posse, Tonto Charley had deliberately kept away from Bud Orpington's homestead, not wanting to get the old man into trouble. But now that Collins wasn't after him, Tonto decided to make Orpington's cabin his headquarters.

Tonto was whistling as he rode up the

hillside trail to Orpington's. A huge figure, gray bearded and tall, appeared in the doorway. Recognizing Tonto Charley's voice, Orpington told him to light down.



THAT same evening the Spence brothers held a council of war. Surmising that Tonto Charley had pulled the water pen, and had shot the dipper out of Bill's hand as a hint that there might be more to follow, the Spence brothers realized that they would have to step fast. Wirt and Ed voted to move as many horses as they could gather the following day, while Bill Spence argued that it would be better to lie low until Tonto Charley had grown tired of waiting, when they could gather the entire bunch and move them north.

Ed Spence's dead eyes came to life. "You talk like an old woman!"

"Mebbyso. But I seen that empty grave—"

"We'll start gathering the stuff tomorrow," Ed said.

Bill Spence shook his head. Wirt Spence was grinning at him.

For the next three days Tonto Charley spent most of his time up on the ridge back of Bud Orpington's cabin, watching the eastern horizon. The afternoon of the fourth day he saw a dust cloud slowly rise above the Spence corrals and dissolve in the breeze. A little later a dust cloud appeared some distance north of the corrals. Cattle wouldn't move that fast. With a final glance at the surrounding country, Tonto Charley rode down to Orpington's cabin.

"Bud," he said as the old man came to the doorway, "I reckon I'll pull out. They're raisin' too much dust over toward the Notch to suit me."

"Need any help?"

Tonto Charley shook his head. Grinning, he took a deputy's star from his vest pocket, tossed it up and caught it. "She's a one-man job, this journey. Me, I'm the Law."

"My God, Charley, where did you steal that star?"

"You might ask Jake Collins. He ought to know."

"You mean—say, don't you ever take anything serious?"

"Not if I can help it. But this job—well, you know what the Spence boys are."

Orpington fetched bread and meat wrapped in a clean white flour sack. Tonto stuffed the food in his saddle pockets and returned the sack. "Out on them flats it would show up like a buck deer's behind."

Orpington nodded. Charley never overlooked any bets. And now he was heading toward the crest of the ridge, straight north. The Spence ranch was several miles east. But many of Tonto Charley's moves were seemingly queer, until the smoke settled.

Riding across the flat country north of Powderhorn Ridge, Tonto could see nothing of either men or horses because of the intervening chaparral. But the dust, rising and streaking behind them, told him that they were traveling fast. If the Spence boys kept pushing the horses they would arrive at the Box Springs water hole about sundown.

Tonto Charley reasoned that he could easily stampede the horses after dark by slipping up and firing a shot. The broom-tails would high tail it back to The Blue Range. That would bust up the party. But the Spence boys would also high tail it. All that there would be left would be pony tracks. And Tonto Charley wasn't after Whickerbill's horses. He was after the Spence outfit. The only thing to do was to follow them, and get them right and regular. But being a deputy sheriff sure cut a man's circle down considerable.

Sundown shadows streaked the country round about. Tonto glanced toward the dust cloud, almost due east now. The bunch had slowed down. He rode down into an arroyo, eased the cinches on Monte, and ate some of the bread and meat. Dust had settled when he came up out of the arroyo and headed for the distant Box T water hole. Monte's ears flickered back as Tonto hummed a tune. Stars grew sharp in the evening sky.

Propped up in bed in the railroad hospital in Bowdry, his face glowering like a red totem pole, Whickerbill Stevens

was having it out with Doc Holliday.

"You call this grub you're handing me!" complained Whickerbill. "I ain't no papoose. I got all my teeth."

"You're a sick man," said Holliday soothingly.

"Sick, nothing! There ain't enough of me edgeways to get sick. What I mean, one time down in Texas a fella put a slug into me, and being no doctor around to finish me off, I just stuffs a piece of shirt tail in the hole, forks my cayuse and heads for town. When I got in I took a good big drink of liquor—"

"Give him some steak," Holliday said to the nurse. "I'll drink all the whiskey necessary for his recovery."



**TONTO CHARLEY** was lying on the brim of the basin surrounding the Box T water hole, watching the blurred figures of the three men who drifted back and forth in the starlight, guarding the stolen horses. From the distance came the sound of plodding hoofs. The three men drew together. A fourth figure rode up, calling out in a cheery voice, "Hello the camp!"

"What's your trouble this evenin'?"

"Shucks!" said the latest arrival, "I thought it was the wagon."

The cowhand turned to ride away.

"What's your hurry?" said a voice. "We got plenty grub."

Tonto Charley did not hear the reply. A sliver of flame cut the darkness. At the sound of the shot the horses at the water hole broke and swept out onto the flats. Riding like crazy men, the Spence brothers tried to head them. Shots popped in the confusion of shouting and cursing. Strung out in a big arc, the horses were finally crowded back toward the north.

Tonto Charley dropped down from the rim of the basin. The horses were a good two miles west of the water hole. Tonto found a Box T cowhand on his knees trying to get up.

"Take it easy," said Tonto. "Never mind your gun. I ain't with that outfit."

Dazed by the shot which had grazed his scalp and knocked him from his horse, the cowhand mumbled, "Then

who the hell are you with, stranger?"

"You, right now. Where's your wagon?"

"Damned if I know. I was to meet 'em here." The cowboy swayed dizzily. "Reckon I better head for the line shack."

"Step up on my horse," said Tonto Charley. "I reckon yours is runnin' with the bunch."

It was a wearisome drill. Tonto on foot and the cowboy riding Monte. When they arrived at the shack, the Box T hand observed a tall, rugged faced man in the wavering candlelight. The cowboy stared, said finally, "You kind of remind me of a fella I seen in Bowdry once, with Young Joe Hardesty."

Tonto was making a fire in the rickety stove. He threw a handful of coffee into the pot.

"If you was to ask him, Young Joe would forget that," he said.

"Well, anyhow, I'm Bud House. I been ridin' for the Box T—"

"Better fix up that loose shingle on your roof," said Tonto. "Put some salt on her and she'll stop bleedin'."

They had had some coffee, and Bud House, whose head had begun to sting and throb, said, "Who was them fellas, anyhow?"

"I could name 'em, but that wouldn't do you no good. All you know is, your horse piled you. You hit your head on a rock and it knocked you cold. You come to in the line shack, wonderin' which way was north. It ain't necessary for your outfit to know what I'm up here for."

"That's all right with me," said Bud House. "But if I run onto them fellas, I'm sure going to forget my manners."

Tonto Charley chuckled. The young cowhand was mad, clear through. And judging by his eye, he meant what he said.

"If you do run onto 'em," said Tonto Charley, "you want to figure they ain't got any manners to forget—and hold low."



THAT morning as he rode north, Tonto Charley ran onto a Box T hand and told him Bud House was afoot at the line shack. The Box T man glanced



*"No, Jake, they didn't get me.  
But you can't have everything  
your own way."*

sharply at Tonto, and headed for the shack.

The tall stranger had been mighty short in his talk, seemed anxious to be on his way.

A few minutes later Tonto Charley picked up the tracks of the steeldust herd. The early morning sun flickered across wide empty country of brush and sand and rock. Except for a buzzard rounding high in the blue, there was no living thing in sight. Concluding that the Spence brothers would not have set out without having first made some definite arrangement for the disposal of the stolen horses, Tonto followed the tracks long enough to determine that the herd had been pushed still farther north during the night.

A few miles ahead Sundown Cañon cut into the flat land like the slice out of a pie, broad and shallow at its western end, narrowing to a box at the east. Not any too keen about riding directly on the trail of the horses, Tonto Charley swung toward the broad end of the cañon, where he could drop down the shallow slopes and keep out of sight. He planned

to leave the cañon at its eastern end and again pick up the trail of the Spence outfit.

About an hour later, as he was riding up the cañon bottom, he ran onto a surprise. Not more than a quarter of a mile ahead, in the triangle where the walls converged, a thin web of smoke was weaving up in the still air. Near the fire was the figure of a man on foot. Beyond him two mounted men were guarding a band of horses.

Back-tracking until he was out of sight round a bend, Tonto rode across to the northern side of the cañon and worked his way up to the rim. He had located the men he was after.

He was sitting his horse, planning his next move when a tall, dark visaged man on a gray pony pushed quietly out from the junipers behind Tonto, and said, "Like the view?"

Tonto turned his head, saw a man with a high bridged nose, deep set black eyes and a thin lipped mouth. The man had a gun in his fist.

"Mornin'," said Tonto Charley. "Just where can a jasper strike the trail for Downey?"

The thin lipped man ignored the question. "What's your business up this way?"

Tonto Charley played a hunch.

"You ought to know," he chuckled. "You don't need a gun to find out. We got 'em here, all right. Been holdin' 'em, waitin' for you to show up."

"Who's waiting?"

"Why, Ed and Bill and Wirt. Who did you expect?"

"Never mind that. How come you left your outfit and headed down the cañon?"

"Hell, mister, you're nervous! Ed said he was expectin' you at sun-up. He said that, seein' you hadn't showed up, for me to drop down the cañon and if I run onto you I was to tell you everything was all right."

"Did he say who I was?"

"Not any," said Tonto quickly. "He just told me what you looked like."

"That's all right. But how about you heading for Downey? Your talk don't track straight."

Tonto Charley simulated disgust.

"Listen, mister. Yesterday mornin' I pulled out of Bowdry, headin' for Downey and a job with the Warner outfit. I run onto the Spence boys at the Box T water hole yesterday evenin'. They said they was makin' up this way, and would I lend a hand with the ponies. What I mean—them ponies is sure wild. Anyhow, I agreed to side the boys as far as Sundown. This mornin' Ed said he wouldn't need me any longer, so I lit out."

Tonto Charley almost persuaded the thin-lipped man that this was so, but not quite. The man gave a shrill whistle. Two cowhands rode out from behind the junipers. They were ready for business.

"Will I let him have it, Al?" said one of the hands.

"Not yet. I want to see Ed Spence first."

The thin lipped man, Tonto surmised, was Al Pierce. And it looked as if he were playing along with the Spence outfit. Tonto knew that if he made a fight of it now he ran a big chance of getting crippled or killed. And he was after the Spence boys, not Pierce and his men.

Tonto Charley offered no resistance when Pierce took his gun from him, merely remarking that Pierce was making a mistake. Nor did he protest when Pierce told him to turn his horse and head up along the rim of the cañon. Tonto had blundered into a tight corner. But he believed in his luck.



ARRIVING at the head of the trail which broke down into Sundown cañon, Pierce halted.

"How many hands in your outfit?" he called to the men below.

"Three," Ed Spence called back. "What's the trouble?"

Pierce told Tonto Charley to get going.

"Got the makin's?" Tonto asked one of the hands.

"Not for the kind of smoke you mean."

"You're too tough for your job," chuckled Tonto. "Watch out you don't bite yourself."

Ed Spence met them at the cañon bottom. His dead blue eyes glittered as he recognized Tonto Charley.

"Here's your friend," Spence called to Wirt.

Al Pierce told his two cowboys to ride over and take a look at the horse herd. As they took the places of Wirt and Bill Spence, Al Pierce turned to Ed Spence. "I've got his gun. He claims he's with your outfit. You all can settle that."

Wirt Spence rode up with a grin on his face. "Morning, Charley!" Wirt Spence gestured toward the horses. "How do you like 'em?"

"Nice bunch of ponies," said Tonto.

"Like to count 'em?"

"Let Pierce count 'em," said Tonto. "Then they won't tally short."

"Told you we'd have trouble account of that empty grave," said Bill Spence.

"Shut up!" Ed Spence stepped in between Tonto Charley and Bill, who had pulled his carbine from the scabbard and cocked it. "Where did you run onto him, Al?"

"Down the cañon. He said he was heading for Downey. But he was watching you boys."

"Well, you did a good job. That's Tonto Charley."

"The hell it is!"

"Too bad, Tonto," said Wirt Spence. "You done played your last chip."

Tonto Charley shrugged. But he was far from feeling indifferent. Unless he played a mighty fast game, right now, he knew he wouldn't leave the cañon alive. With the deliberate intent of starting an argument, he turned to Al Pierce.

"If you're interested in them ponies," he told Pierce, "you better put on your gloves before you handle 'em. For why? Because your friends here done bumped off a man by the name of Whickerbill Stevens before they run off his horses. And likewise, they bumped off a Box T hand yesterday evenin', on their way here."

Wirt Spence started to go for his gun, but Pierce held up his hand. "Just a minute, Wirt. We'll settle our deal first. You made a big mistake if you got a Box T hand. Your trail was wide enough without that."

"And it'll be wider," said Tonto, "when the Box T boys run onto him, layin' stiff at the water hole."

"I didn't figure on getting mixed up in any killing when I made the deal with you boys," declared Pierce.

Tonto Charley saw the color run up into Wirt Spence's face. A hot-headed fool, he was always a jump ahead of himself.

"You mean you ain't going to do business with us?" said Wirt.

Pierce shook his head. "Not when there's two killings on the books."

"Dam' you, Tonto!" Wirt Spence went for his gun.



TONTO CHARLEY sunk his spurs into his horse. Monte reared. As Tonto kicked his feet free from the stirrups, Spence fired. Al Pierce, sitting his horse almost directly behind Tonto Charley, doubled forward and slid from the saddle. Tonto's horse went over backward and crashed into Ed Spence's mount. Both horses went down.

Pinned by a leg, Ed Spence was trying to kick loose when Tonto flung himself on top of him. As they struggled and rolled in the sand, Ed Spence's gun slid from the holster. Tonto Charley grabbed it. Bill Spence, his carbine at his shoulder, didn't dare to fire for fear of killing Ed. Wirt Spence, his arm up, was waiting for a chance to get Tonto. Pierce's two cowboys were coming on the jump.

Tonto swung up his arm and hit Ed Spence over the head with the gun barrel. Spence wilted.

"Get him!" cried Wirt Spence.

But Tonto was still crouched over Ed Spence. The cowboy who was too tough for his job was heading into the mix-up. Tonto Charley's gun flashed. The cowboy jerked stiff in the saddle and slowly toppled over. The other Pierce cowboy set up his mount, whirled, and took off across the cañon.

On his knees, Tonto Charley threw a quick shot at Wirt Spence. He missed. Behind Tonto, Bill Spence drew fire, holding the head of his carbine on the middle of Tonto Charley's back. Wirt Spence was grinning.

The whine of a slug came long before the sound of the shot. Bill Spence staggered, dropped his carbine. It exploded

as it hit the ground. Some outsider had taken a hand in the fight. The shot had come from across the cañon.

As Bill Spence dropped, Wirt fired blindly at Tonto Charley. Realizing that he had missed, Spence threw himself forward in the saddle and spurred down the cañon.

"Takes three, four kinds of nerve to make a real man," chuckled Tonto Charley. "And there goes nothin'."

Shoot the fleeing rider in the back? Hell, no! A long shot, anyhow. And Ed Spence's gun had a pull like a wagon brake. Wirt Spence had got away. But the outfit was busted up plenty.

Wondering who had dropped Bill Spence in his tracks—it had been a long shot, evidently from the south side of the cañon—Tonto Charley caught up his horse. Bill Spence was dead, and Al Pierce and one of his cowboys. The other cowhand had quit. But the outsider, across the cañon, who was he, and what was he up to?

Huddled in the rocky triangle that boxed the cañon, Whickerbill's horses milled restlessly. A horse broke from the band. Another followed. With a rush of hoofs and the flicker of manes and tails, the entire herd took after the leader.

"Hi!" came a shout from across the cañon. "Them horses are going somewhere."

Standing behind Monte, Tonto Charley shouted back, "To hell with the ponies! What I mean—show yourself!"

A figure rose from among the boulders along the south wall. He carried a Winchester and approached cautiously.

Tonto Charley grinned. "Feet hurt you?" he said as he recognized the slow stepping cowhand.

"It ain't my feet," Bud House replied. "It's my head. Say, mister, I thought sure as hell you was a goner."

"I kind of had the same idea, till you took a hand."



BUD HOUSE glanced at Bill Spence, crumpled up on the sand. Al Pierce lay a few yards beyond him. A short way up the cañon the Pierce cowboy was on his hand and knees, vomiting blood. Bud

House's gaze came back to Ed Spence, who lay on his back with his mouth open. "Wholesale!" muttered House. "My God, what a mess!"

"You got good eyesight," said Tonto Charley.

Bud House came back to himself. "Me? Well, it was like this. The wagon pulled in to the Box T water hole this morning. The rod was worrying about them pony tracks, being so many of 'em, and seeing I wasn't doing nothing but sit around and feel tough, he said for me to find out who was keeping them ponies bunched, and where they was going. He said I wasn't to do nothing about it, just report back to him."

"You kind of slipped up on your orders about doin' nothin', looks like."

"When I seen you coming across the cañon with Al Pierce I figured you was one of the gang," said House. "I thought you fellas was all talking friendly, till the ruckus started. Then I seen the whole bunch was out to get you. But things was spinning so dam' fast I didn't dast to horn in, till that fella—" House indicated Bill Spence—"got set to shoot you in the back. I shoved the sight up to a hundred, and took a chance. Seems like somebody had to stop him."

"Feelin' kind of tough about it, Bud?"

"Kind of. First time I ever got mixed up in a killing."

"Well, that there gouge on your head ought to keep you from forgettin' that a horse thief is anybody's meat. You done a good job."

Ed Spence was trying to get up. Tonto Charley walked over to him. Spence seemed to ignore Tonto, kept on staring at the body of his brother.

"That's the fella that took a crack at me yesterday evening," said House, glaring at Ed Spence. "I seen his whiskers."

"I reckon you'll have to let that ride," said Tonto. "I'm takin' him down to Bowdry to talk to the sheriff."

"If I was taking him," said House, "it would be with his feet sticking out of the end of a wagon."

"I ain't got a wagon."

Ed Spence was on his feet, staring at Tonto Charley. Tonto read the thought back of those dead blue eyes.

"Wirt," said Tonto, "he quit and



started for home. Bill is yonder. Your outfit's busted. Are you comin' along quiet or have I got to cool you down again?"

Spence said slowly, "Who the hell do you think you are, talking about turning me over to the sheriff?"

"Me? Why, hell, Ed, I'm nobody, regular. But this journey, seems like I'm one of Jake Collins' deputies."

"So Collins didn't have guts enough for the job, and he hires a killer to do his dirty work for him."

Bud House saw the hot color run up into Tonto Charley's face. The young cowboy's neck tingled as Tonto said quietly, "You said it all, Ed. Now if this here is botherin' you," Tonto took the deputy's star from his pocket and tossed it away, "why we'll start even."

"You can talk big, seeing you got my gun."

"You'll last longer if I keep it. What I mean, you fellas didn't give Whickerbill Stevens a chance. I'm reppin' for Whickerbill."

"Talk don't hurt nobody."

"Have it your way." Tonto Charley shrugged. Bud House started to edge to one side.

Tonto had tossed Spence's gun down on the sand.

Turning his back on Spence, Tonto Charley began to walk toward the body of Al Pierce. Spence stooped, picked up the gun. There was a faint click as he cocked it. The sound of his shot was lost in the two swift, blunt reports as Tonto Charley whirled and fired. For a second or so Spence remained upright. House didn't believe that Spence had been hit. Slowly Spence's hand relaxed. The gun dropped. He leaned forward as if to pick it up, staggered and fell face downward.

Tonto Charley glanced at the still figure, turned and walked over to his horse. His eyes were blank. He didn't seem to see Bud House, white-faced and tense. "God, but you were quick!" said House. "He come mighty near getting you."

"I reckon the sun must have been in his eyes," said Tonto. He could have said more. Ed Spence hadn't seen him recover his gun from where it lay near

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Pierce. When Spence fired he thought Tonto Charley was unarmed. Tonto had seen it in those dead blue eyes.

"Those horses," said Bud House.

"They'll head back to The Blue. They were bred in the hills. Anyhow, I wasn't huntin' horses this journey."

Together Tonto Charley and the young Box T cowhand rode up the cañon trail and out onto the mesa that spread east toward the Box T home ranch. When they came to where the trail forked, Bud House nodded toward the distant water hole. "Punching cows is good enough for me. I'm for the wagon."

"Stick to it," said Tonto. With a nod he turned and continued on, south.

Bud House would have plenty to tell the outfit. But he would hold out on them a little. He wouldn't say anything about his having taken a hand in the fight. And he wouldn't know the name of the tall deputy who had cleaned up the horse thieves. But he had guessed it. He had seen him in Bowdry, with Young Joe Hardesty. Tonto Charley, it was. Funny, him wearing a deputy's star, when folks said he was an outlaw and a killer.

Tonto Charley punched the empty shells out of his gun and reloaded as he rode south, following the fresh tracks of a shod horse. That would be Wirt Spence, making for The Notch. Wirt Spence would now be in Collins' territory. Probably he would hole up till things quieted down. Anyhow, the gang was busted up. Collins hadn't taken any chances. Let Collins smoke him out.

Swinging west, Tonto made for the distant ridge back of Bud Orpington's cabin. To keep on following Spence's tracks would be an easy way to get knocked off from ambush. Tonto hoped that Bud Orpington would have some whiskey.



THREE days after the gunfight in Sundown cañon, Whickerbill Stevens, more gaunt than ever, and feeling a bit shaky, was standing at the Silver Dollar bar talking with Sheriff Collins. It was mid-afternoon, and there were one or two customers in the saloon.

"I ain't lodging no complaint about getting shot up," Whickerbill was saying. "I'm asking you where Tonto Charley is."

"How do I know?"

"Mostly you don't. But this trip I got a hunch you do."

Tired of Whickerbill's pestering, Collins said brusquely, "I know this much. You're liable to arrest for aiding and abetting a criminal. Tonto Charley was hiding out in your shack when I was up in The Blue looking for him. I asked you. And you told me you had never set eyes on him."

"I told you I was the biggest liar this side of California, before you asked me." Whickerbill's melancholy face was lighted with a grin. "You wouldn't believe even that."

"Aiding and abetting a criminal—" Collins reiterated.

"Now sheriff, don't you try to fuster me up with fancy law talk or I'll sic my dog onto you. I ain't got a dog. But I can get one. What I mean—there's a lot of talk going around town about the Box T boys running onto three, four corpses over in Sundown cañon. Seems two of them corpses was Ed and Bill Spence."

"So I heard."

Whickerbill cleared his throat. "And they say one of 'em was Tonto Charley."

"It might be."

"But you don't know for sure?"

"No. Probably it is mostly talk."

"It ain't all talk," said a voice from the doorway.

Sheriff Collins started, scowled at the tall, rugged figure of Tonto Charley. Whickerbill's eyebrows crawled up his forehead, but he made no other sign of recognition as Tonto, his hat pushed back, strode up to the bar. Ignoring Whickerbill, he called for a drink. Turning to Collins, Tonto said in apparent good humor, "No Jake, they didn't get me. That was too bad. But you can't have everything your own way."

"Hell, Charley, what you talking about?"

"You looked kind of surprised when I stepped in. But let that ride. I come to tell you that the job is done, except Wirt Spence got away."

"So they tell me."

"And you ain't turnin' a wheel. How many drinks would it take to make you stout enough to go after him? I'll pay for 'em."

Collins' heavy face grew a deeper red. "See here, Charley, I'm running the sheriff's office."

Whickerbill's eyebrows lifted again. The talk was getting kind of warm. His eyebrows dropped to a frown as a short, lean figure quietly entered the rear doorway of the saloon. The man stood stock still, watching the group at the bar. Slowly Whickerbill's gaze focussed on the grim reality. The man was Wirt Spence. He wore no hat. His eyes were wild. His teeth showed in a hard grin, and he swayed the least bit.

Both Tonto Charley and the sheriff stood with their backs toward Spence, unaware that he was in the room. Whickerbill's hand crept toward the sheriff's holster. Whickerbill tried to catch Tonto Charley's eye. But Tonto's gaze was on Collins.

Just drunk enough to believe that he could take on a dozen men like Tonto and the sheriff, and certain that he could get them both before they could turn and fire, Spence dropped his hand to his holster. But too hot-headed to keep his mouth shut, he cried, "Got you!" and swung his arm up.

Hovering above Collins' holster, Whickerbill's hand swept down, up. The gun flashed. At the same instant Tonto Charley's fist took Collins square on the chin. The sheriff dropped as if he had been shot, and Tonto fell on top of him.

Whickerbill was leaning over Wirt Spence. But there was no need for another shot.

The bartender's head appeared above the bar.

"Holy smoke!" he said. "Tonto's fixed the sheriff!"

A lone customer crawled out from underneath a table, took one look at Collins on the floor, and dashed out to the street to spread the news. Tonto Charley had shot Sheriff Collins.

Tonto Charley heaved Collins up and steadied him as the sheriff fumbled at his chin. Slowly the sheriff's dull gaze traveled round the room. His hand dropped to his empty holster. His gaze

swung from the body of Wirt Spence to Tonto Charley. "What—who—"

"Me," said Whickerbill, "and your gun. Aiding and abetting the law." He pointed to the hole in the bar. Spence's shot had torn a hole in the panel directly in line with the spot where the sheriff and Tonto Charley had been standing.

"That was Wirt," said Whickerbill. "Figure it out yourself."

Whickerbill stepped up, returned the sheriff's gun. Whickerbill turned to Tonto Charley. "Mebby, you'll have a drink with me."

"Sure!" said Tonto. "So will Jake. He needs one."

"Ain't you cutting it a little fine?" said Collins, the color coming back into his face.

"Dam' fine, seein' you asked me. See here, Jake. You're just goin' through the motions of bein' a good fella. When I set out after the Spence boys, you was wishin' to God not a one of us would come back. That would have been a right slick clean-up for you. But somehow the cinch held, and I didn't get piled."

"Now see here, Charley—"

"You'll find that deputy's star up in Sundown Cañon," Tonto said. "Whickerbill's ponies headed back for The Blue Range. Me, I'm headin' for Bud Orpington's. I kind of feel like takin' it easy for a spell."

"How about bushing at my place?" said Whickerbill. "I'm going to get out of this town as quick as the Lord and a couple of broncs'll let me."

Tonto Charley chuckled. "Thanks. But somebody dug a grave back of your cabin while you was in the hospital. I might make a mistake and fall into it. You see, I don't want to make it too easy for Jake."

"Charley," said the sheriff, "you got me wrong. I'll fix it so the governor'll rig you up a pardon. Then I'll swear you in as a deputy, regular. What do you say?"

"Nothin'."

Tonto Charley nodded to Whickerbill, pulled his hat down and strode out to the hitch rail. He pulled up the cinch, swung into the saddle, and headed for The Blue Range.

*Shielding his movements by his body, he dumped the strychnine into the sugar sack.*



# SPY OF THE NORTH

By LUKE SHORT

**W**HEN FRANK NEARING, prospector and trapper, came to Lobstick to meet the incoming plane, it was ostensibly for the purpose of welcoming a partner from the outside. But

LUTE WESTOCK was in reality a total stranger, a man whom Nearing had agreed to hide in his cabin for a thousand dollars and no questions asked.

Nearing had been assured that the man was not a criminal, and he needed ready money desperately enough not to ask many questions about the strange set-up. However,

CORPORAL MILLIS, in charge of the district, had been noticing a growing taciturnity in Nearing, and privately determined to check into the trapper's actions.

**BRUCE McIVOR**, who had arrived on the same plane, had been selling strychnine to a ring of illegal trappers. Caught by Nearing, he is temporarily saved by

**KELCY McIVOR**, his sister, who boldly admits her brother's guilt, but counters by the statement that she knows that both Nearing and Westock also have a secret to hide. It was true. Each of the two men had good reasons for avoiding any investigation. They agreed to say nothing for the present about Bruce's activities.

**SAUL CHENARD**, Lobstick trader, had been the cause of young McIvor's acts. Through

**BONNIE**, a dance hall girl, he was playing the dangerous game of supplying the trappers with the illegal drug and masking his activities from Kelcy. But when he heard about Nearing's suspicions, he determined to wreck the new-comer's trap lines and get him out out of the country. However,

**CHARLIE**, Frank's Cree helper, caught Saul's man and came back to the cabin just as Nearing was telling Westock the real secret of his strange behavior. Because the cabin at Wailing River was no trapper's shack. It masked a tunnel and an abandoned gold claim—a claim which Nearing had reopened to strike rich ore. But under the law a claim had to be abandoned for three years before a new staker could file. And there was still a month to go before Nearing could act. In the meanwhile, he could only wait, and keep his secret from the outside world. Frank caught the trap-wrecker, injuring him badly in an effort to disarm him. He brought the man to Lobstick for medical attention, and once more was warned by Millis that his secretive actions were causing a lot of comment in town.

There was nothing he could say or do. He had to play his dangerous game out for a month—alone.



**THEY** shook hands and Frank went out. Even Millis was curious about him now, he thought in deep disgust. He unhooked the breed's dogs and chained

them out, then headed for the hotel. So Millis thought there was such a thing as being too solitary?

He had framed it in the way of friendly advice, but underneath it was a disapproval and a watchfulness that Frank didn't like.

His dogs put up and fed, Frank went to the barber shop, got a shave and a bath, and came out on the dark street. He turned, almost unconsciously, toward McIvor's big post at the head of the street, determined to satisfy the nagging curiosity that had been with him these last five days.

The big radio on the dry goods counter was booming, and the people around it eyed Frank in a kind of trance-like silence, listening to the war news, as he walked to the counter on the opposite side.

He had seen Kelcy McIvor, arms folded on the counter, listening. She straightened now, and crossed the store to him. She was wearing a green sweater and skirt today, and Frank noted that she was not wearing boots, and also that her ankles were trim. She came up behind the counter and paused there and said, "Something for you?" She was not very happy to see him. Frank almost smiled and gaped gently, "Yes, I'd like to see some chartreuse underwear—a two pants suit."

Kelcy said quickly, "We've nothing in chartreuse, but we have a little hair number in peach that I'm sure you'd like. Won't you step outside and try it on?"

Frank did smile then; it was the ghost of a smile, and it was in acknowledgment of her temper that he was sure would not fail her. Kelcy didn't smile, and there was plain unfriendliness in her eyes.

Frank put a leg up on the counter and sat on it, and said quietly, "I didn't know if you'd remember me."

"Perfectly. It was such a charming afternoon."

"You remember that?" Frank asked softly. "Somehow, I thought you'd forgotten it."

Kelcy caught the undertone of something close to a threat in his voice. She said. "Blackmail isn't easy to forget."

"Not for me, but I wondered if it was for you."

"What do you mean by that?"

Frank drew his hand from his parka pocket. With his body screening that hand from the radio listeners across the room, he set the fat little bottle of strychnine on the counter. He did not look at it; he watched Kelcy's face. She smothered a start of surprise and looked up quickly at him. He put the bottle back in his pocket.

Kelcy looked across the room, then said, "Come back where we can talk."

Frank followed her into a storeroom in the rear. She shut the door, and kneeled an almost empty keg of nails across to block it, then turned to him. The lamp in the wall bracket was turned down; Frank turned it up and confronted her.

"Where did you get that?" Kelcy asked.

"From a curious man," Frank murmured. "Remember, you told me everybody was curious about me?"

"But where?"

"He'd rifled my shack. I followed him and we—"

"I've heard about it already. It's Joe McKenzie."

Frank nodded. "I took this from his outfit."

Kelcy looked searchingly at Frank. "And why did you come to me about it?"

Frank answered dryly, "I haven't tasted the stuff, but I think it's part of what your brother brought in."

"That's a lie," Kelcy said calmly.

Frank shrugged. "Maybe. Still, the blackmail that worked on you will work on Joe McKenzie, I think." He hefted the bottle in his hand and said, "Joe didn't deny he got it from Bruce McIvor."

"But he couldn't have! Bruce had five ten-ounce bottles. I disposed of them."

"The package I picked up weighed at least five pounds," Frank murmured.

In the following silence, Kelcy regarded him cautiously, and with a new curiosity.

She said slowly, reluctantly, "Now you have me worried."

"That's what I want."

Kelcy leaned against the door, and

folded her arms. "May I have that to show Bruce?"

"No."

"Why not?"

Again Frank hefted the bottled, then slipped it in the pocket of his parka. His deeply tanned face looked gaunt and fanatic in the uncertain lamplight.

"I didn't come here to discipline your kid brother," he said crisply. "You've missed the point. We made a bargain that day in the hotel."

"It was more a threat, wasn't it—if you turn up Bruce, I'd turn Millis on you?"

Frank nodded. "You haven't put Millis on me, but you put Joe McKenzie. There's not much choice between the two. I don't like it."

"You're mistaken," Kelcy said quietly. "I could be. Still, until our talk at the hotel, I was left alone. Afterwards, my shack was searched."

"What have you got out there, a gold mine?" Kelcy asked dryly.

"I'm working on a magnetic ray," Frank said, irony in his voice. "When I get it perfected, I can draw the moon down to the Eiffel tower. I'll climb aboard then with some bees grapes and raise vine leaves for my hair."

Kelcy smiled tentatively, without much humor. "I'd be the last person to stop you from doing that."

"Then keep your pals from breathing down my neck," Frank said shortly.

Kelcy straightened up. "There's not much sense in this talk," she said, an edge to her voice. "I'm not faintly interested in you, or what you're doing. I never was. I was forced into taking an interest because you were a threat to Bruce."

"I still am."

"I tell you, I had nothing to do with Joe McKenzie!" Kelcy flared.

Frank hunched his shoulders.

"One more strike and you're out," he said. "That's a promise." He started for the door.



THE conversation was finished. Frank kicked the nail keg away from the door, while Kelcy watched him, anger stirring in her blue eyes. She said then,



"Either you're a squaw man and you're ashamed of it, or you're an embezzler in hiding or you're just a ham Thoreau up on your Walden Pond! Whatever you are, I'll leave you alone and I'll see that Bruce leaves you alone. So the next man that comes up there out of grub and asking for some, you can shoot him without referring it to me."

Frank said gravely, "Thanks just oodles," and went out.

Kelcy stared at his broad back as he walked the length of the store. She hated him, then, and she didn't understand him. What was the matter with the man? Maybe he was like the Englishman her father told her about who hated people so much that he built a shack on the edge of the Barrens and lived like a beast rather than associate with them. But this man had a partner—two partners: an Indian and the big suspicious blond man. It wasn't solitude he wanted; it was to be let completely and utterly alone.

Kelcy closed the storeroom door, so angry her hands were shaking. She took a deep breath and got a sort of control over herself. She saw Frank step out into the cold night, a plume of steam sweeping across the floor as he opened the door. There was a kind of hostile loneliness about that scene that stirred her, and then vanished.

The store was empty when Bruce came in at seven. Kelcy heard him shut the rear door and she went back to meet him, a haste driving her. Bruce was hanging up his hat and coat in the storeroom; he said, "I'll take over, sis."

"Not until you answer teacher for a few things," Kelcy said grimly.

Bruce looked sharply at her. His dark face, pleasant and weak, was set in a defensive scowl. "Now what?"

"Frank Nearing was in here just now. You heard about his tangle with Joe McKenzie?"

"I heard," Bruce answered in a wary voice.

"After Nearing beat him up, he found a bottle of strychnine in his outfit, Bruce."

"So what?" Bruce asked defiantly.

As Kelcy watched him, she knew in her heart that what Frank Nearing had

suspected was true. Bruce couldn't hide anything from her, and his guilt was on his weak face even before the accusation.

She sat down on a coil of rope and leaned back against the wall.

"Bruce, why are you such a fool?" she asked bitterly.

"What are you talking about?"

Kelcy made a weary gesture. "It's no use lying. You gave me five ten-ounce bottles and told me that was all. You lied. You brought in five pounds. And you sold the rest, I suppose."

Bruce didn't answer. He watched his sister with a kind of breathless wariness, waiting to hear the rest.

Kelcy was finished. She got up, took her coat and hat from the nail, and slipped her feet into galoshes. She started for the door. Bruce said, "Wait, sis!"

Kelcy turned, waiting for what he had to say.

"What are you going to do?"

"Nothing," Kelcy said softly. "Frank Nearing will do it for me. He said he wouldn't report it this time. But one more strike and you're out, Bruce. Those were his words."

"What does he care?" Bruce said hotly. "I'm not hurting him!"

Kelcy was about to answer, and then thought better of it.

"He does care," she said steadily, "and that's what you ought to worry about."

"Nobody's using it up in his country!" Kelcy didn't bother to answer, and Bruce added bitterly. "That pious bush-tramp. I'd like to break his neck!"

"I wouldn't advise trying it," Kelcy said calmly, and added with a friendly bluntness, "There's a man who isn't impressed by your charm, Bruce. He's warned you. You'd better wipe your nose, or you're going to get in real trouble."

Bruce glared at her.

Kelcy said, turning to the door, "I hope I don't see Dad's face when you come to the pay-off."

"Shut up!"

"Okay, Crippen. Have it your own way."

Kelcy went out, and Bruce stared at the door a long while after it was closed. Reluctantly, almost, he set about build-

ing the fire in the store room stove, a precaution against the stored canned goods freezing during the bitter nights. That done, he walked moodily toward the front of the store, his trim shoulders hunched, hands thrust in the front pockets of his breeches, dark face saturnine and sulking.

He leaned his shoulder against the back counter, put his foot up on a front counter shelf and stared moodily at the vacant store. He wasn't afraid of Kelcy telling on him; she was too loyal. It was Frank Nearing he had to fear—Frank and Saul both.

Right now, he was shouldering all the risk in this, with Saul covering up for himself. If Nearing spilled it, Saul would be clear.

He thought of Saul, rather than Frank, wondering about him—and about Bonnie. It was queer, those two living there in the hotel a room apart from each other. For one bleak moment, he wondered about Bonnie, and then he wouldn't think about it. Bonnie had told him it was all right, that Saul was only a business friend and that she was able to take care of herself. She loved him, and God knows he loved her. Bonnie was straight. Every time she smiled at him, something seemed to melt inside him, but she was straight.

All the same, he was uneasy, and turned his thoughts to Nearing, trying to recall all he'd heard of him. The sum total was nothing. Bruce hated him suddenly with the hot and unreasoning hatred of all men for a righteous man who might be a squealer.



HIS reverie was interrupted by the opening of the front door. A woman stepped in and headed for the postoffice wicket; before the door closed, Bonnie came through too.

At sight of her, Bruce waved and smiled, then went in behind the wicket.

"I want Gus Nelson's mail," the woman said.

Bruce reached up to the N pigeon-hole, sorted the letters and gave her only a T. Eaton's Co. advertising circular. She left, and Bonnie stepped to the window.

"Stealing stamps?" she asked, smiling.

But Bruce only grinned, and did not look up. He was looking through the letters in his hand, a musing expression on his face, and he stopped at one, a long official envelope, and laid it aside.

Bonnie screwed her head around and read: "Frank Nearing." She looked up at Bruce, and Bruce said, "What's his partner's name?"

"Westock, isn't it? Why?"

Bruce drew another sheaf of mail down from the W section, searched it, and brought out a lone letter. By that time there was alarm in Bonnie's face.

"What are you doing, Bruce?"

Bruce seemed undecided for a moment, then he took the letters and left the wicket.

"Come on back," he said to Bonnie.

Bonnie silently followed him back to the warm storeroom. On his way, Bruce took down a small teakettle from the nest of them hanging on a bale overhead. He went into the rear of the storeroom, put a cup of water in the kettle at the sink pump, and put the kettle on the stove. Then he passed Bonnie and closed the door.

Again Bonnie asked, "What are you going to do, Bruce?"

Bruce only grinned and came up and put his arms around her. Bonnie kissed him dutifully, gave him a fleeting smile, and then said with a soft alarm, "Better put them back, kid."

"What?"

"Those letters."

"It's easy," Bruce said, grinning. "Besides, I'm curious."

Bonnie said sharply, "Don't be a fool, Bruce! You aren't going to open them?"

"Why not? I've done it before."

"But what'll it get you—outside of a stretch in prison?"

Bruce said grimly, "Nearing is riding hell out of me. I'm going to find out why he's here, and what about him. I tell you, I'm curious."

Bonnie gripped his arm. "But you can't do it, Bruce! It's the same as mail robbery—and they'll give you ten years for that!"

"Who'll know, unless you tell them?"

"That's not the point! It's the risk!"

"It's my risk."



*"The blackmail that worked on you will work on Joe!"*

"It's not!" Bonnie said passionately. "What if they make you tell why you did it! Nearing will tell them. And then you'll drag us in!"

"Us?" Bruce's voice had a little edge to it.

"Yes, me and Saul," Bonnie said defiantly.

"Oh, so it's Saul you're worrying about?"

"Don't be like that!" Bonnie cried. "I'm only telling you what will happen!"

Bruce said thinly, "You seem damned concerned about Saul, Bonnie. Why?"

"I'm worried about myself—and you. Can't you see that?"

Bruce's voice was ugly. "I'm not so sure. You're worried about Saul. Bonnie, are you two-timing me?"

"Oh damn!" Bonnie said, in complete exasperation. "Are you going to start that again, Bruce? I don't give a hoot about Saul, except that he's put up money for my restaurant! All I'm trying to tell you is that we're running enough risks, without mail robbery added to it!"

Bruce looked at her in bleak silence, his eyes suspicious and afraid and pleading.

Bonnie had seen that look before. She came over and took Bruce's head in her hands and kissed him.

"You jealous, simple fool," she murmured.

Bruce said wickedly, "Bonnie, if you're lyin' to me I'll kill you, so help me!"

"If I'm lying, I hope you do."

There was a moment of silence, and then Bonnie said softly, "Bruce, put

those two letters back. Please. For me."

"No," Bruce said stubbornly. "I've done it before. There's no risk to it, and you can't tell they've been opened." He burst out, "Let me alone, won't you. Bonnie? I know what I'm doing!"

There was a wild look in his face and Bonnie knew it was useless to argue. If he was crossed, he got ugly and stubborn and headstrong, and his temper was a thing that she couldn't brook.

She sighed resignedly. "All right. Only hurry. I'll watch the front. Lock that back door and hurry it."

They had a few moments to wait until the water boiled, and it was spent in

strained silence. Finally, the kettle began to sing, and Bruce went about steaming the letters open. He read them both, while Bonnie watched the front of the store. She heard him go dump the water into the sink and turned around to watch him.

"Don't tell me about it," she said swiftly. "I don't want anything to do with it." She put her hands over her ears.

Bruce was smiling. "I think I'll go on a little trip tomorrow, Bonnie. Up the Wailing. I'm the mailman."

Bonnie only shook her head and went out into the store, feeling a vast relief. The unbridled temper of him made her afraid. She remembered that look in his eyes when he promised to kill her if she was unfaithful to him, and she shivered a little. She knew he would do it, too, if he ever learned what she and Saul were to each other.

## CHAPTER V

### FORCED FLIGHT



THREE miles below the entrance of Whitefish Creek into the Wailing, Charlie Cree had cut a trail to the west that presently opened onto Swan Lake. Charlie's trail skirted the south shore, vanished into a stand of birch at the foot of a west bay, threaded a tortuous muskeg and opened into a broken uncertain country where Charlie had once seen marten tracks. It swung north finally and entered Christmas Valley at its southwest corner. Charlie had never caught a marten there, stone or pine, but he religiously made the rounds of this line, taking two days at it, usually returning with a moose or a deer he had killed.

When Frank came to that fresh trail at cold and brittle noon on his way home, he tested it and swung his dogs into it, glad of the news it told him. For it was fresh, and Charlie must be up and around, and his dogs fit again.

An hour's run over a good trail brought Frank out onto the lake. Here, the trail left the shore and cut across the mile of sun-dazzled snow on the open lake to the far shore. He followed it

with curiosity, wondering what Charlie was up to. Nearing the further shore, he saw two men and a dog team on the lake, just off a poplar point. Closer, Charlie and Lute stood up to greet him.

Frank whoaed his dogs and looked at the scene. A bull moose had broken through the ice here, just off a point of land, and he was dead. Charlie had hitched the dogs to a rope which trailed out ahead to give both himself and Lute a purchase, too, in dragging the big fellow out of the hole.

All that was dropped now at Frank's approach. He shook hands all around, and they broke out smokes, sitting on the sleds. Lute's face was flushed with exertion, and he was grinning as Frank offered him his tobacco pouch and he rolled a cigarette. Charlie, not talking, already knew that Frank was satisfied by his trip. He was quiet, taciturn, Frank saw.

"Well, who was the mystery man, and where'd you come from?" Lute asked, sitting on the nose of Frank's sled. Charlie squatted in the snow, pinching his cigarette in his long brown fingers.

Frank told of the chase, of the fight, and of his visit to Lobstick, and finally of his conversation with Kelsey McIvor. Charlie only grunted.

"So it's that brat of a brother again," Lute mused, when Frank was finished. "What did the girl say this time?"

"She didn't say," Frank murmured. "She didn't have to. I have the evidence this trip." He drew out the corked bottle of strychnine, and Lute and Charlie looked at it and gave it back gingerly, as if it might explode.

Then Lute said, "Any mail for me, Frank?"

"None for anybody," Frank said. Lute swore in disgust. Frank caught Charlie's glance, a little worried, and shrugged. In this mail they had both expected that Frank would get a letter from the recording office in Ft. Resource, confirming the rules for the forfeiture of a claim. In any legal fight which might ensue, this would be valuable evidence.

Frank talked to Charlie then, asked about his ribs, saw that the deep cut on Charlie's face was healing well, and then turned to their business.

"What happened here?" Frank asked, walking over to look at the moose.

"I was just leaving the lake for the portage across the point into those birch," Charlie explained. "I jumped him feeding out here on the point. He took one step off the point and went through."

"Sulphur spring?" Frank asked.

Charlie nodded. "He couldn't get back because the bank was too steep, and he couldn't quite make it up on the good ice when he got through the rotten stuff. I shot him, and figured to windlass him up on the bank, but there wasn't a tree big enough to take his weight. I went back for him." And he nodded toward Lute.

The gesture was eloquent of Charlie's opinion of Lute, and Frank knew immediately that Charlie didn't like him either. A week together had told Charlie all he wanted to know about their new partner, and he had made up his mind. Frank guessed that Lute was the reason Charlie had hit the trail again, alone.

He wanted to be away from Lute. The

man's quiet gall, his alert curiosity would earn him no affection from Charlie. And in a negative way, it explained to Frank why Lute was so glad to see him. Charlie could clam up when he didn't like a man, and Lute had suffered too. He was hungry for talk, and right now he was torn between that hunger and pride. He stood at Frank's elbow, silently regarding the moose after his first talkative outburst.

Frank felt a kind of pity toward him. "Ever eat brisket, Lute?"

"Can't say I have."

"Get a pot boiling up in the brush and we'll have a feed."

Lute left to build the fire, while Charlie and Frank unhooked Frank's dogs and put them ahead of Charlie's team. Charlie didn't talk much, and finally Frank, impatient, growled, "Why don't you say it, Charlie?"

Charlie looked up. "You got his money?"

"Half of it."

"Then it's all right," Charlie said calmly.

"You have any trouble with him?"

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Charlie looked at him a long time, then shook his head.

Frank jibed fondly, "Go ahead. Tell me your old man had a word for him. Your old man would have said, 'Big white man speaks with forked tongue'."

Charlie laughed then, and nodded. "That's about it, Frank. Only he would have made medicine against him."

Frank suddenly felt a hot loyalty for Charlie. What was necessary, Charlie would suffer, and Lute and his money were necessary. Charlie didn't question it.



THEY called Lute over then. Charlie, with a long spruce pole, got a pry on the moose, and Lute and Frank, with Charlie cursing the two dog teams into action, succeeded in skidding the moose out on to good ice. Frank and Charlie worked swiftly then, for the water would quickly freeze on the hide. They skinned him out, set the brisket to boiling, then leisurely finished the job of butchering. It was dark by the time the job was done. They and the dogs feasted that night.

Next day, Lute broke trail on ahead, while Charlie and Frank, their sleds loaded heavily with meat and their dogs lazy from glutting, finished the circle of Charlie's marten line and slipped down into Christmas Valley after dark that afternoon.

Nearing the shack, Frank, first behind Lute, noticed his dogs suddenly lift their tired heads and keen the air. A moment later, snaking through the thick stand of spruce, he came upon Lute, motionless, at the edge of the clearing.

Lute called back in a low voice, "There's a light in camp, Frank."

"Go on," Frank said curtly.

They moved on toward the shack, and now in the clear Frank could see a lamp was lighted in the shack, and smoke was lifting to the canyon rim in the still air.

He stopped his dogs by the cache, and Charlie came up behind him. Then the three of them went hurriedly for the door.

Frank was the first to enter, and he hauled up just inside the door. There, sitting at the table, chair tilted back, a

half smile on his dark face, sat Bruce McIvor.

"Gentlemen," he said mockingly.

Lute and Charlie entered and shut the door. Frank regarded Bruce with a puzzled suspicion that narrowed his eyes for a moment.

Then he said quietly, "Did you come up to get it straight from the horse's mouth, McIvor?"

"Call it that if you want," Bruce drawled.

Frank turned to Charlie. "This is the guy that was peddling the strychnine."

Bruce only smiled, and didn't say anything.

"Make yourself at home," Frank murmured. "We've got work to do. I'll talk to you later. Lute, you entertain him." The light of a sudden wry humor flickered in Frank's eyes. He drew the bottle of strychnine from his parka pocket and stepped beyond the table and set the bottle where Bruce could see it on the edge of a rough shelf holding several books. He said to Lute, not looking at Bruce, "Tell him a story, Lute. Tell him the one about the little bottle of white powder and the policeman. It's a favorite of his, because he thinks it's a fairy story."

Bruce smiled faintly and Frank and Charlie stepped out into the night. They both moved in the same direction then, toward the drifted trail that led to the tunnel entrance. Charlie squatted and tested the edge of a track. The snow crumbled immediately under little pressure. He said quietly, "He's had a look at it, Frank. There are his tracks."

Frank said slowly, "Maybe it's time to throw a scare into him that'll make him forget it."

They unloaded the sled, unhooked the dogs, fed them and fed Bruce's team, which was chained out in the timber behind the shack.

Afterwards they came in. Frank pulled off his parka, and Charlie settled on the edge of the bunk. Bruce hadn't changed his seat, and Lute now came away from the stove, his eyes alert and watchful.

Frank kicked a stool up to the table and sat down.

"Now," he began, "let's hear you beef."



"Beef?" Bruce inquired. "What have I got to beef about?"

"Your sister said you didn't like the bush. You've spent a couple of days in it to reach me. You must want something."

Bruce slowly reached inside his wind-breaker and brought out two crumpled letters.

"I just thought I'd bring you your mail," he said. "There's one for each of you."

Lute came over and picked his letter up. Frank reached over for his. Lute turned his over, and then looked quickly at Bruce.

"This has been opened!" Lute said sharply.

"So has the other," Bruce said. He smiled faintly, watching Frank.

Frank drew out his letter. It was from the recording office. It stated the rules for the forfeiture of a claim, and the requirements for the granting of a patent. He stared at it a long time, not even reading it, and let the significance sink into his mind. Bruce McIvor had opened the letters. He now knew, couldn't help but know, that Frank was getting ready to restake a claim that had been forfeited. And everyone in Lobstick knew of the old Christmas Creek claim.

Putting this letter and the new door in the tunnel together, adding Frank's secrecy and his resentment against visitors, young Bruce McIvor knew the whole secret that Frank had fought to keep these many months.

Frank folded the letter slowly, and glanced up at Lute. Lute had just finished reading his letter, and his face was ugly with anger. Bruce McIvor had a cigarette in the corner of his mouth, and was rubbing the head of a match, watching Frank.



IT WAS Lute who moved first. He drove a fist into Bruce's face with a power that knocked him clean off the stool and against the wall.

Frank lunged to his feet and leaped on Lute's back, pinning his arms behind him. Lute, cursing wildly, fought to get free, kicking out at Bruce.

Frank wheeled him around and pushed him away, and Lute turned, his face savage with anger.

"Cut it!" Frank said sharply. He was between Lute and Bruce, whom Charlie had hauled to his feet by the collar of his shirt.

"Let me at him!" Lute raged. "Damn him, I'll kill him!"

"You'll sit down and shut up," Frank said softly, "or I'll have to show you again that I'm running this outfit."

He turned to Bruce McIvor, who was rubbing his jaw. His dark eyes were wicked with anger and fear.

It was easy to see that he had not counted on this and he seemed a little puzzled, as if he were trying to recall what it was in Lute's letter that justified this anger.

Charlie shoved Bruce into a chair.

"You better talk, and talk plain," Frank said bluntly. "How'd you get hold of these letters?"

"My dad's the postmaster," Bruce said sullenly.

"Why'd you open them?"

"You know damn well why," Bruce snarled. "Sis told me what you told her! I took a chance on steaming open your letter, and when I found out what was in it I didn't bother to seal it up again. I've got you now, Nearing! You aren't going blabbing to Millis about me now!"

He shifted his glance to Lute. "When I get back to a newspaper, I can find out why you're hiding out too, Westock."

Frank said calmly, "Just what do you know about me?"

Bruce laughed. "I know you've found ore on this claim. It isn't yours, either, and you're writing to check on the forfeiture rules. I also figured out that old Christiansen quit workin' on this claim about three years ago, too, so you haven't got long to wait to restake."

Frank eyed him gravely. "And now you know, what will you do?"

Bruce leaned forward. "You know damn well what I'll do, Nearing! You know about this strychnine. Well, it's a pretty nice thing for me, and I'm not going to have you gumming up the works! You won't now, either." He laughed. "And another thing you won't do, in case you're afraid. You won't

put me out of the way. You aren't the kind of bush tramp that would kill a man."

He glared triumphantly at Frank and then at Lute, and leaned back in his chair. "Now that you've got all the steam worked off and are willing to listen, I'll make my deal. That's what I came here for."

Frank looked over at Charlie, whose face was impassive. Charlie shrugged faintly. Lute was standing there, an expression of alert interest in his small face.

Frank said, "What's the deal?"

"Shut up about me, and I'll shut up about you and this strike. I'll forget I saw the letters."

"And if I won't make the deal?"

"I'll spread the word around about what's going on here. I'll get word of Christiansen and tell him, and he'll spoil your plans for you." He looked at Lute. "I'll tell Millis what I remember of your letter, too. He might be interested to know that Carl says the search is clear off the trail, and that you seem safe enough where you are."

Lute smiled crookedly. He now had perfect control of himself.

Bruce pointed out shrewdly, "But you were worried enough about it to slug me."

"That was for opening my mail. I'd slug you if I'd found you'd opened a tailor's bill addressed to me."

Bruce laughed. His confidence had returned, and he knew he had the upper hand now. He said to Frank, "There's something else I want, too, Nearing. I'll take a piece of this strike of yours, just to sweeten things up. It'll be signed and witnessed by these two. That's the deal. Take it or leave it."



FRANK looked at Charlie and nodded toward the door. Frank stepped outside then, and Charlie followed.

Out in the raw cold, Frank faced Charlie. "How does it look?"

"He's no good," Charlie said quietly. "He couldn't keep a secret, Frank. Not even if he made money out of it."

"He's a rummy," Frank said bitterly. "He'd get tanked in Lobstick and talk,

and the whole town would move up here to stake this out." Frank groaned then, and smashed his fist into his palm. "Three weeks, Charlie—three damned weeks, and I don't care who he tells! Our claim will be recorded then!"

"Can you hold him here?"

"And have a search party with Millis heading it come up here and find him?"

"What else?"

The door opened and Lute stepped out then. His hulking figure approached them in the night.

"Well, that tears it for you," he said gloomily. "Are you going to take him up?"

"What was in your letter?" Frank asked, not even apologizing for asking it.

"It was from my lawyer. My wife's got the law on me, just as I thought she would." He added grimly, "I'd like to twist that kid's head off. I don't like people snooping in my mail."

Frank grunted. "Well, you're on the spot, too, boy. Any suggestions?"

Lute hesitated for a moment, as if about to say something, and then changed his mind. He said quietly, "There's no choice. Better take him up."

Frank was quiet a long moment. He stood there in the night, shivering, and he suddenly knew that he was not going to lose this without a fight. A summer of misery, of sacrifice, of hopes held in check, of luck, of grinding labor, of risk and of nerves wirethin with anxiety—all of it was suffered so that a worthless, dishonest cub would profit by it. It wasn't going to happen.

Frank said quietly, "Let's eat. I'll think about it."

They went in, and Charlie and Frank set about getting something to eat. Bruce McIvor smoked and kept his silence, alert for any indication of how this would be decided.

They ate moose steaks and biscuits, nobody talking, and afterwards lighted smokes. When Bruce McIvor could stand it no longer, he said, "Well, is it a deal, Nearing?"

Frank didn't answer. He got up and went over to a bunk and took down a canvas packsack. He said to Charlie, "That will hold two bannocks, one blan-

ket, some tea, some sugar, matches, a kettle, a box of shells, a knife and some salt, Charlie. Help me round the stuff up, will you?"

Wordlessly, Charlie cleared off the table, and he and Frank got together the things he named. Bruce McIvor watched them with a jeering contempt in his eyes which slowly gave way to anxiety.

When all the stuff was assembled on the table, Frank said to Bruce, "Need anything more? A change of socks?"

"What for?"

Frank sat down and brought out his pouch and rolled a cigarette carefully, then he began to talk. "You're right about this claim, McIvor. In three weeks it will automatically be forfeit and I'll stake it, with just a few changes. But you won't be anywhere near a mail plane or a radio, or a telegraph to stop me."

"No?" Bruce said, suddenly cautious.

"No. Tomorrow, Charlie and you and I are starting out on a trip. It's a hard five-day travel with dogs back to the height of land. On the other side, you can pick up a creek that empties into Horn lake. You can follow that out till you come to a portage on Horn Lake. There's a trader there—Weymarn. He does a little tripping in the winter over across Horn Lake to some of those Baren's outfits." He paused, watching Bruce McIvor's dark face. "It takes three days to make Weymarn's crossing from the height of land. It'll take six days to make it back here. Your sister says you're no bushman. I think you'll head for Weymarn's unless you want to starve, because I'll give you only two days' grub and no gun. Weymarn usually makes a trip in late winter to Ft. Resource with his fur. You can go in with him. Or, if he'll sell you dogs and a gun, you can come back over this way. I doubt if you'd have the guts to try it, though. But any way you figure it, you'll be out of my hair for these three weeks. How does it sound?"

All the bluster had drained out of Bruce McIvor's face. He licked his lips and said, "You mean you'd turn me loose back there on the height of land without dogs or grub or gun?"

"You'll have my big hunting shoes. You'll have two days' grub, so you can make it to Weymarn's."

Bruce McIvor came to his feet turning over his chair.

"You can't do that!" he shouted.

"That's murder!"

"Not quite," Frank demurred.



BRUCE McIVOR stared at him, searching with his eyes, and he knew he was licked. He suddenly lunged past the table for the door. Lute tripped him, and he crashed to his knees, but he kept scrambling and grabbed his rifle which he had leaned behind the door. It was wet with sweat, glistening and shiny as he turned it on Frank.

"I don't guess I'll go," Bruce said. His voice was a sneer, its tone triumphant.

Frank put his elbows on the table and smiled broadly. "You've got less sense than I supposed you had," Frank murmured. "All right, you've got a rifle in your hands. Go out and hook up your dogs."

Bruce didn't say anything for a moment. Then he asked, "You mean you'll let me go?"

"That's just what I don't mean," Frank murmured. "The minute you put that rifle down, we'll jump you—all three of us."

Bruce considered this for a moment as the others watched him.

Frank went on. "Even supposing you get your dogs hooked up, you won't get far. I just fed them. They'll get sick. They'll play out on you and then you can wait, with no grub, with no bedroll, for us to come after you. That ought to be fun in the dark."

Bruce regarded him with a wild and rash anger in his dark eyes.

Frank went on placidly, "Or if you don't think you can hook up the dogs, my shoes are outside. Take them, and try and make Lobstick with no grub, no bedroll, and us following you on the trail you'll break for us."

Lute laughed mockingly, and still Bruce didn't take his gaze from Frank's lean face.

"Or," Frank finished idly, "you can

shoot us. And you haven't got the guts for that."

He turned his head away then and said, "Charlie, let's roll in. We'll start early tomorrow."

He looked over his shoulder at Bruce, who was still holding the rifle on him. "When you've made up your mind not to do it, McIvor, you better clean that gun and put it outside. A gun sweats in a warm shack. It's not good for it."

Bruce McIvor's anger broke then. Cursing wildly, he slammed the rifle to the floor. He was helpless, and he knew it, and he poured a torrent of abuse at them. It reminded Frank of a child in a tantrum, and he listened with a faint amusement. When Bruce had talked himself out, Frank said, "Take the top bunk, McIvor. We're getting up early tomorrow."

Bruce sulked a moment longer, then crossed the room and climbed into his bunk.

Frank turned to Lute. "Do you think you can stay awake tonight?"

"Sure. Why?"

"You sit up and keep watch, just in case he gets ideas. It'll be a long trick, but Charlie and I need the rest and you can sleep tomorrow. That all right with you?"

"Absolutely," Lute said.

When they had all turned in, Lute shaded the lamp, took down a book from the half dozen on the wall shelf and sat down at the table.

He moved the packsack and the pile of grub off to one side of the table, asked, "That light in your eyes?" got the answer that it wasn't, and settled down to reading.



SILENCE filled the night; the only sounds were the distant crack of frost splitting the trees, and the patient gnawing of the dogs on their half frozen meat outside. Presently, Lute ceased turning the pages and listened carefully. He picked out Frank's deep breathing and Charlie's light exhale. In half an hour, during which he didn't turn a page and only stared at the book, he heard Bruce McIvor's restless moaning.

Still Lute didn't move; he stared at

the book, not seeing it, and gave himself to the bleak solitude of his thoughts. His eyes were dark and sombre now, and his face had a set bitterness that deepened as the minutes went on.

He sighed deeply then, and looked up from his book, listening. There was sudden decision in his face now. He rose, stoked the fire, and stood by the stove, again listening. Then, satisfied, he moved quietly over to the supply shelves. From one of them, he took down an opened sack of flour, and leaned it against the table leg.

He paused again, making sure of the same rhythm of breathing, and then he stepped over to the bookshelf where the bottle of strychnine sat. He took the bottle.

Back at the table, he settled in the chair, and holding the bottle in his hand, regarded it a long time, as if reluctant to move.

When he did move, it was to take from Bruce's supplies the small sack of sugar, which held about a cup, and untie its drawstring. Then he carefully drew the cork of the strychnine bottle. Shielding his movements by his body, he quickly dumped the strychnine into the sack of sugar, tied the drawstring and then kneaded the sack, afterwards putting it back by the other grub.

From the flour sack at his feet, it was only a moment's work to take enough flour to fill the strychnine bottle again. That done, he returned the flour sack to the supply shelf and the bottle to the bookshelf.

He stopped then, just out of the circle of lamplight, and looked at the grub on the table. He seemed satisfied.

Before he sat down again he burned the letter which had been brought to him that afternoon.

An hour before dawn Lute rolled them out of their blankets. Bruce sulked on the edge of the bunk while Charlie and Lute rustled up breakfast. Frank loaded the sled in the raw cold that precedes daylight. They ate and afterwards Charlie loaded the meagre supplies into Bruce's packsack and strapped it. This would be their parting gift to Bruce on the height of land.

There was nothing left now except to

lash the load and hook up the dogs, and Frank, Lute and Charlie made short work of that. Finished, Frank went into the shack. Presently, Bruce came out, his face sullen, and wordlessly accepted his snowshoes, put them on and headed up the valley. Charlie, rifle over shoulder, followed him.

Frank gave last minute instructions to Lute. "Lock up the shack, Lute, and take all the dogs over to Swan Lake and camp there till we get back. You can mosey over to the river trail every couple of days to see if anybody has passed on the way to the shack."

"What's that for?" Lute asked.

"It's to hide Bruce's dogs in case anybody should come up. If they see them, they'll wonder why they're here, and that'll start it. Will you do it?"

"Of course."

Frank yelled at the dogs and cracked his whip. The team snaked out into the breaking day and was soon lost in the spruce.

Lute, smiling a little, stepped back into the shack. He shivered a little and walked over to the stove, putting his back to it. His eyes raised naturally to the bookshelf.

The bottle was gone.

For perhaps a full minute he stared at the spot where the bottle should have been. And then, understanding that one of these three had taken it, he began to laugh silently, pleased with the strange ways of Providence.

## CHAPTER VI

### MASKED TRAILS



BONNIE was at the cigar counter writing out the dinner menus when the door opened. She didn't look up, but went on with her work. Suddenly aware that whoever came in had paused here at the counter, she glanced up from her work. Kelcy McIvor was facing her.

Bonnie said gravely, "Hello, Miss McIvor."

"Good morning," Kelcy said. Her cheeks were flushed with the cold and she smiled warmly. "It smells good in

here." Her manner was a little shy and uneasy and determined.

Bonnie, seeing it, smiled. "Bill's making bread this morning."

There was an awkward pause then, and Kelcy laid her mittens on the counter and unbelted her mackinaw. When she looked up Bonnie was watching her with a calm secretive hostility.

"I'd like some Gold Flakes," Kelcy said.

Bonnie shook her head and smiled faintly. "Sorry. They're a little too tony for our trade."

Kelcy said impulsively, "I don't really want cigarettes. I came to talk to you, and—well, I didn't know how to begin."

"I guess the easiest way is just to begin," Bonnie said slowly.

Kelcy smiled. "Don't think I'm snooping, but I've heard Bruce speak about you so much."

"Not in front of your father, I dare say."

This brought a flush to Kelcy's cheeks, but she went on doggedly. "That's why I've come to see you. Do you know where Bruce is?"

Bonnie eyed her calmly. "No, I don't. You're welcome to look upstairs if you don't believe me."

"I do. Only he hasn't been home for four days."

Bonnie shrugged. "Maybe he's gone hunting."

"He took the dogs and a gun. But somehow I don't think he's hunting."

"He didn't tell me, if that's what you were wondering. And you were, weren't you?"

Kelcy nodded.

Bonnie repeated calmly, "He didn't tell me."

Kelcy looked at her searchingly and took up her mittens.

"Thank you," she said quietly. "I didn't mean to pry." She hesitated. "Do you suppose Saul knows where he's gone?"

"You might ask him."

"Is he here?"

Bonnie shook her head, and Kelcy thanked her stiffly and went out.

Bonnie went back to her work. She wrote haltingly, with concentration, for perhaps a half hour. Two customers had

a late breakfast and stopped to chat with her, interrupting her work. She was returning to it when Saul tramped in. He wore a heavy horsehide coat that was rimed at the collar with frost from his breath, and he stopped at the counter to unbutton it.

"The kid been in?" he asked.

Bonnie said no, and Saul scowled. "Where the hell is he?" He looked carefully at her. "Losin' your touch, Bonnie?"

"A man can choke on too much cake," Bonnie answered.

Saul's pouting lips thinned out.

"You're funny," he said, "but not very."

He tramped on through the restaurant and went upstairs. Bonnie came to a sudden decision. She put her work away and followed him.

When she came into his room, Saul was unlacing his boots, sitting on the bed.

Bonnie put her shoulder against the door frame, placed a hand on her hip and watched Saul in silence.

Presently, she said, "The kid is up at Nearing's on Wailing River."

Saul straightened up slowly, and didn't say anything for a moment.

"Since when?" he asked.

"Four days ago."

Saul came to his feet and crossed over to her, facing her. Bonnie didn't change her expression or attitude, but she watched him carefully.

"Who said so?"

"I figured it out myself."

Sudden wrath crawled into Saul's eyes. He put a hand on her shoulder and swung her into the room, then slammed the door. Bonnie stood there defiantly, rubbing her shoulder.

"A fast one," Saul murmured. "Tell papa, now."

"That's all there is to it!" Bonnie flared. "Frank Nearing went in to see Kelcy McIvor with that poison he took from Joe. Kelcy climbed all over Bruce and he was mad! I came in just after they'd fought and Bruce was stealing a letter of Frank Nearing's. I saw him open it, and then he told me he was going to deliver the letter."

"The damned fool," Saul said softly.

His hot eyes were on Bonnie. "What was in it?"

"I didn't want to know."

"Why didn't you tell me that night?"

"Why should I?" Bonnie said.

"Because it's a prison offense to open mail! If he's caught, if Nearing complains, the kid will be arrested. And if he's in a jam, he'd spill everything he knows about us! I could have stopped him!"

"I'm not simple," Bonnie said calmly. "I know that."

Saul stared at her, puzzled, detecting a new note in the conversation but not understanding it.

Bonnie said suddenly, "How long do you think you can kick me around, Saul?"

"Go on," Saul said, quiet menace in his voice.

"All right, I did it to scare hell out of you!" Bonnie flashed. "What do you think of that?"

Saul said, "Pretty," very softly, and did not smile.



"MAYBE you can see what I've been telling you, now!" Bonnie said harshly. "That kid's been carrying your head around in a basket, and you haven't seen it! No, you've got to moon around his sister, you big slob, when we both ought to pull out of here while we can! How can you trust a kid like that, Saul! Are you going to hang around here until he gives us away, just because his sister smiles at you!" Her face was twisted with anger. "Maybe you like jail and your memories, but I don't!"

Saul's hand lashed out and slapped across Bonnie's mouth with a brutal force. It knocked her against the dresser and she fell, and some bottles on the dresser top tinkled over.

She put a hand to her mouth. Her eyes were wide with fright and surprise.

Saul said meagerly, "I don't know why I don't twist your neck, baby."

Bonnie shrank against the dresser, and Saul cursed her in a level, deadly voice. She was afraid he was going to kick her, but he didn't.

When he was finished, he said harshly, "Get up!"



Bonnie came to her feet, shaken and afraid.

Saul said, "I don't know how this will turn out, but if they touch me I'll kick you all the way back to the Skid road. And you won't have enough teeth left in your face to earn your living."

Bonnie didn't say anything; she was more afraid than angry, and more shocked than either. She knew Saul was a rough man, that underneath his workaday affability there was a hard and predatory cruelty; but that had always been reserved for somebody else. She faced it now and it was naked and raw and savage. She had overplayed her hand, and Saul wouldn't spare her.

He sat down, wordlessly, and laced his boots again, and Bonnie watched his broad muscular back with growing concern. Finally, she murmured, "I'm sorry, Saul. What can I do?"

Saul stood up and shrugged into his big coat. "You can go see Joe McKenzie and tell him to rig his story. Because if the kid doesn't get back here soon, the McIvor's will call Millis in. Kelcey will spill the whole thing to Millis, and he'll put the screws to Joe. Tell him that."

"Where are you going?"

Saul's arrogance tipped the corner of his mouth in a faint smile. "I'm going to see the Duchess, puss. And do you know what you're going to say about it? Nothing—not one damned word."

Bonnie was afraid to argue, but the resentment and jealousy showed in her eyes. Saul stepped over and took the point of her chin between his broad fingers and pinched it and shook it cruelly. "I've been pretty good to you, baby.

But keep out of my hair from now on."

He went out, and Bonnie stood there, eyes smouldering. She raised her hand tentatively to her face where he had struck her and fingered it softly.



WHEN Saul stepped out into the cold morning, his anger was under control. The town was busy. A team hitched to the frame of a bobsled passed him, their shod hoofs ringing on the iron ice and the runners squeaking under the load of logs being hauled. The horses' noses were white with frost, and they breathed long plumes of steam like story book dragons. The dozen people on the sidewalks hurried along with short steps, heads bowed as if they were facing a wind. If a man stopped and listened, he could hear his breath crackle faintly as it froze.

Saul walked downstreet, the snow wailing under his boots, and pondered his next move. The thing he had to do now was reassure Kelcey so that her panic wouldn't drive her to Millis. There was no way of telling what the kid had done, but they'd cross that bridge when they came to it.

Bonnie was right, he thought sourly: the kid was carrying their heads around in a basket. Now, all he could do was stall for time until Bruce showed up. That would be easy enough, too, for Kelcey trusted him and believed in him. There was a girl, he thought fondly. She wasn't like her cheap phoney of a brother; she had class and looks and a kind of bedrock honesty, the kind that money couldn't buy. He thought of her



with hunger and respect and a gentle friendly contempt. She was a child, a pretty child, but she would make a man a wife that could bring envy into the eyes of a king. He dismissed that thought immediately, the longing still lingering as he mounted the steps to McIvor's store and stamped the snow from his boots.

Inside, Mr. McIvor, a kindly Scot with dead white hair and full mustache, was waiting on trade. Saul saw Kelcy on the other side of the store, and he went over to her. She smiled when she greeted him, and Saul said, "I'm after some inside mittens—two pair."

Kelcy got them for him, and when she came back Saul said, "Well, did Bruce get his caribou?"

Kelcy looked up at him quickly. "Caribou? Is that where he is, Saul?"

"Hunting? Yes." A pause. "Didn't he tell you?"

Kelcy laughed shakily. "I went down to the restaurant today to ask Bonnie where he was. He's been gone four days. Bonnie said she didn't know."

Saul smiled, and shook his head. "Bonnie's a queer one. She knew, of course."

"She doesn't like me, Saul."

"Naturally," Saul laughed. "Bonnie's a nice girl, Kelcy, but she's suspicious of anybody better than a hasher. Also, she's fond of the kid and knows she shouldn't be, and that makes her uneasy with you."

"Is—she a good person, Saul?"

Saul considered this a moment, and then said, "Well, do you think I'm a good person?"

"Of course."

"Then she is. She's straight as string, and with her own kind they don't come better." He laughed, and there was a faint embarrassment in his laughter. "Bonnie and I are a lot alike. I understand her."

Kelcy sat on the counter now, and said, "How do you mean, alike?"

"We both started from the bottom of the heap. We've stepped on a few necks getting where we are. We're both rough, ignorant, and a little afraid of our peers, maybe."

Kelcy laughed then. "But you're not like that, Saul."



"I am," Saul stated solemnly. "If I hadn't been, then I wouldn't be so confounded shy about asking you if I couldn't see more of you, and take you to dances and such."

"Why, Saul!" Kelcy was pleased, and a little embarrassed too. "What a strange thing to say!"

"Not when you understand it. I've been a bouncer in Skid Road dance halls, and I've tended bar in some pretty tough joints. I've seen a lot of muck I'd like to forget, and for a long time I thought all women were alike. That's hard to live down, even when you can read books that tell you it isn't."

Kelcy looked at him with a frank and honest regard.

She said with grave good humor, "There's a danee Saturday night, Saul. Can you square dance?"

"There isn't any other kind for me."

"Would you like to take me?"

Saul laughed. "I would break my neck for the chance."

Kelcy laughed too. "It's a date."

Saul picked up his purchase. "Don't



*"I've got a lot to even up with you, Nearing."*

worry about Bruce, Kelcy. I have a notion he's borrowed a shack from Ben Hudson up on Kettle Creek. If he's had any luck, he'll wait until Ben swings around that way to help him haul down the meat. It might be a week."

"That's a relief," Kelcy said.

Outside, Saul rammed the mittens he did not want in his coat pocket, and reviewed his accomplishments. They were considerable. Kelcy was reassured, and he was taking her to the dance. Bonnie would like it or lump it. He remembered young Bruce's warning to stay away from Kelcy, and he smiled. With a mail

robbery hanging over his head, the kid couldn't sing very loud or very long.

## CHAPTER VII

### DEATH IN HIDING



A HARD three-day snow had slowed them, so that on the evening of the fifth day they lacked a half day's travel from the height of land. It had been a slow,

puzzling job, this trip. Frank and Charlie had traveled it in summer, going the opposite direction, and a good part of it had been observed from under a seventy pound pack. When the creeks petered out into streams, memory faded, and there was only the tilt of the land, the shape of the country and its gaunt bony ridges to guide them over the right portage to Horn Creek.

But on that fifth night, they were certain. It was Charlie who, that afternoon, had walked out onto a bare tamarack meadow, toed out of his shoes and, using one for a shovel, dug down through the snow to earth. A half dozen small pieces of charcoal bespoke a fire in the past, and Charlie remembered it as one he had built on this salt lick to serve as a smudge while he skinned out a caribou he had shot.

Their camp that night was on the frozen hummocks of a muskeg in a tight tangle of scrub tamarack that broke the wind. Charlie fed out the last of the dog food while Frank cut some inadequate brush for their beds and stretched the tarp behind it.

Bruce was dog-weary, but more cold than tired, and he rustled wood against the bleak night ahead of them. A thin dark beard-stubble shadowed his face; in these five days his cheeks had hollowed out and his eyes had grown harried. Only a stubborn pride had kept him going, for he had been forced to match the pace of two seasoned bushmen who considered it a confession of weakness to ever step on the tailboard of a loaded sled and ride.

Charlie and Frank had let him alone, and he was glad for that. Whatever ideas he had of breaking away had long since vanished. He found that this tall, taciturn man and his silent Indian companion were fighting him on their own ground. They were careful always to carry or be near the two rifles. At night they hid the shells. Other than that, he was free to do anything he liked, but on the first weary day he came to realize that he was chained to them by hunger.

And by something else, too. It was fear. Once they left the trails, the blazes, and in a whole day's travel did not see a single axe mark, however gray, that

would tell Bruce someone had been here before him, he was afraid. And it was this fear of that vastness and solitude that fed his hatred for his two guardians.

Nights as they lay in their bedrolls, the firelight playing on the dirty tarpaulin slanting above them, Bruce would finger the bottle of strychnine in his pocket, trying for the courage to use it. He was certain they didn't know he had it. A little of it in the food and they would be finished. But he couldn't do it; his hatred was not enough. Yet there was something he could do to them, something that would even the score. On the third night he had thought of it, and on the fourth night perfected it. Tonight was the night.



IT WAS before they had eaten and Charlie and Frank lay stretched out, feet to the fire, waiting for the kettle to boil, that the talk began. Bruce was sitting back against the tarp, and in a half circle away from the fire the chained dogs still gnawed at their frozen food. When they looked up, their eyes were green opals with the reflection of the firelight.

Frank said, "What do you figure to Horn Creek, Charlie?"

"Oh, a half day easy."

"We might as well leave the dogs here tomorrow and go ahead on shoes, hadn't we?"

"And hunt on the way back," Charlie agreed.

Frank looked over at Bruce, who was watching them in sullen anger. Frank only smiled and rose to turn the thawing bannock propped toward the fire. He peered at the rice in the meat kettle, saw it was done, swung the kettle off with the axe handle, threw a handful of tea into the other pot, swung it off, and their supper was ready. And in that short space of time, Bruce knew what he was going to do.

Bruce was careful tonight not to talk. When the bannock was passed to him, he broke off a large hunk. Charlie flipped the lard bucket to him, Bruce smeared the bannock thickly with lard, sprinkled it with sugar and laid it aside. While the other two were busy eating, he care-

fully broke his piece of bannock and crammed half of it, grease and all, into his pants pocket.

He had a vast impatience with the rest of the evening, and it was he who first suggested hitting the bedrolls. The hardest part would be to keep awake, for he was dead weary. But he lay there, face turned toward the tarp, until he heard the others sleeping.

Then he drew out his bottle of strychnine. Hands under the bedroll, he fumbled his crushed piece of bannock into one hand and the uncorked strychnine bottle into the other. He dumped the powder onto the bannock in his hand, and then kneaded the whole mess into a damp ball of soggy bread. That done, he corked the bottle and put it back in one pocket, and placed the wadded ball of bannock in another. He went to sleep remembering that the first thing he must do in the morning was wash his hands thoroughly, lest he poison himself.

Charlie had a fire going long before daylight. They ate a hurried breakfast, cleaned up camp, and at the first crack of dawn was ready to start.

The dogs stood up, waiting to be hooked up. Charlie laughed at them and they started to bark. Bruce put on his snow shoes, feeling his heart hammering with excitement.

From the carriole, Frank took the packsack, which was still strapped tightly the way Charlie had left it at the shack, and handed it to Bruce.

"Put it on. You might as well get used to it."

Bruce did, and afterwards they left camp. Charlie took the lead, gun over shoulder. Bruce walked in the middle.

Fifty yards from camp, Bruce suddenly stopped. "I haven't got any tobacco."

Frank said, "Let's see."

Bruce pulled out his pouch. It was almost empty. He said, "I saw a third of a can back in the grub box. Do you care if I take that?"

"Ask Charlie. It's his," Frank said.

Charlie murmured, "Sure, take it."

Bruce turned and started back to camp. Frank and Charlie waited. When Bruce got back to camp, the dogs were all standing, eyeing him hopefully, their

tails wagging. Bruce brought out his wadded ball of bannock, broke it into five pieces, and gave each dog a piece. They wolfed it down in a gulp. He would like to have stayed long enough to see the poison work, but he didn't want to have them suspicious enough to come back.

He rejoined them, and they started off again.



ALL that day, Bruce thought about the poisoned dogs. He could imagine Frank and Charlie pulling into camp tonight, tired and hungry, to find all five of their dogs dead and frozen. They would be wild. They'd have to leave their whole outfit there, stuff their pockets with not enough grub, and spend a weary week of hungry days and cold nights, maybe more, before they got back. And that was worse than he had to put up with, which was consolation.

In mid-morning the land began to tilt down to the north, and in early afternoon they picked up a tiny stream fringed with stunted alders.

Charlie hauled up, and Bruce and Frank came up to him.

"There's Horn Creek," Frank said. "Follow it down. Weymar's place is at the mouth. It ought to take you two pretty stiff days travel."

Bruce hunched the pack up on his shoulders, and when he turned to regard them, he was almost smiling.

"How long'll it take you to make your shack?"

"Six long days," Frank said. "But I don't figure to hit the shack. We'll cut over to Lobstick, and that'll take over a week. I'm going to be there in plenty of time to get my claim letter out to the recording office."

"What are you going to do when they miss me?"

"I'll give myself time and then tell them. But I don't think anybody will miss you enough to be curious."

Bruce's haggard face flushed a little at the jibe, but his smile soon returned. "And you think it'll take you a little over a week?"

"That's right."

"Wouldn't want to bet on that, would you?"

Frank frowned. "Sure, I'll bet."

"Better not," Bruce drawled, grinning. He raised his mittened hand to his fur cap in mock salute. "So long. I've got a lot to even up with you, Nearing."

"You'll have plenty of time to figure out how," Frank murmured.

"And I will. Thanks for nothing." Bruce looked at Charlie and sneered. "You too," he said. They watched him until he disappeared in a stand of timber.

Then Frank said, "What was he talking about?"

Charlie shrugged and looked up at the sun. "Give me your gun and I'll bet you we have deer steak for supper." He had already forgotten Bruce.

Three miles down Horn Creek, Bruce discovered he was hungry. He built a fire, opened his pack, filled his kettle with snow and propped his bannock up to thaw out. He could still get a laugh at the scene Frank and Charlie would find when they reached camp.

He pulled out his stolen bottle of strychnine and looked at it. It was half full. There'd been enough stuff in that wad of bannock to kill an army, he thought, putting the bottle back in his pocket.

Just before the water boiled, he broke out his lard and sugar and waited impatiently for the food that was a minute away.

## CHAPTER VIII

### TRAITORS DON'T TELL



LUTE had a letter to mail, and the process involved some difficulty. There were ten dogs in camp; five of them Bruce's. He couldn't show up in Lobstick with Bruce's dogs, or there would be questions asked. He'd have to leave them for four days, and they'd have to be fed.

Lute was a methodical man, so he did what was necessary. He took one day's feed, multiplied it by four, then placed that much meat before each of the chained dogs he was to leave.

His letter was written and in his pocket, and he set out for Lobstick,

driving Charlie's dogs. That letter was to Carl, warning him to never, under any circumstances, write again. If they were hot on his trail Carl was to radio him a code message, nothing else.

He arrived in Lobstick on a Saturday morning, chained his dogs out behind the hotel and walked to the postoffice.

Stepping inside McIvor's store, he went over to the mail window where Kelcy was.

She recognized him immediately, and barely nodded in return to his greeting. "I would like a stamp," Lute said.

Kelcy sold him one. Lute licked it, placed it squarely on the envelope, his manner precise and unhurried.

There was something so quietly arrogant, so unruffled, so unbending about this big man that it was like a challenge.

"Were you sent down to check up on my end of the blackmail?" Kelcy asked him.

Lute finished his business with great deliberation, then handed the letter to Kelcy.

"That was unfortunate," he said calmly. "I was mistaken that day about the eavesdropping."

"So you've come down to apologize."

"Not quite," Lute said stiffly. "I meant what I said, only I put it bluntly, I'm afraid."

"I'm afraid so, too," Kelcy retorted. They looked at each other a bare moment, but there was something in the man's eyes that made Kelcy look away. They should have been nice eyes, she thought later; they were a nice color of blue, clear, widespaced and recessed, but there was a quality of agate about them, a surface light that was as chill as glare ice. She was glad when he touched his cap and went out. Only then did she remember that she hadn't asked after Frank Nearing. Immediately after this, she wondered why she had ever thought she should ask about him. It was puzzling, this feeling, and she supposed it resulted from her concern over Bruce.



LUTE went down the street, seeking food. He passed up the hotel as somehow being too conspicuous, and turned into the Star Cafe. Taking a seat at

the counter, his stomach gnawing and almost tasting the good smells, he ordered a meal and then waited patiently.

Bonnie, from behind her counter, saw him come in. She knew every man in this town, every trapper in the surrounding bush, but she did not know him. And then suddenly, she remembered Saul describing this man. He was Frank Nearing's partner, the man Nearing had met at the plane that day Bruce dropped the strychnine.

Bonnie studied his profile, a faint interest stirring within her. If this was Frank Nearing's partner, and he had come down from the Wailing, where was Bruce? Bonnie considered this question a moment, more out of curiosity than concern for Bruce. What would he do if she went over and asked him? Surely, he knew about the strychnine, and about Bruce delivering the two opened letters. She thought of Saul, and how angry he would be if she did this, and then a slow anger stirred within her. She didn't care what Saul thought. This morning Saul had told her he was taking Keley to the dance that night. There had been an argument, and Saul had hit her again. Hard.

She came out from behind the cigar stand, a shapely, sullen-looking girl in a white wool sweater that fitted tightly. She took a stool beside Lute, who turned his head to look at her, then looked away and picked up his glass of water.

"How's Bruce?" Bonnie asked.

Lute was drinking. He finished drinking, and deliberately put down the glass, then regarded her. "Bruce who?"

"You're Lute Westock, aren't you, Frank Nearing's partner?"

"That's right."

"I'm talking about Bruce McIvor. He's up at your place on Wailing River, isn't he?"

Lute was a long time answering, during which interval he regarded Bonnie with an unblinking stare that was baleful and not pleasant.

"Who said he was?" Lute asked finally.

A half-breed waitress in a white uniform came in with Lute's breakfast then. In front of her boss and a handsome customer, the girl was solicitous until

Bonnie said impatiently, "He's all right, Mary. Beat it." The girl sulked back into the kitchen. Lute began to eat as if Bonnie wasn't there.

Bonnie slid off the stool and said with a faint amusement, "Okay, Stonepuss. You two guys will change your tune with Bruce now though, won't you?"

Lute didn't even look at her, but asked, "Why?"

"You know why," Bonnie retorted. She walked back to the cigar counter, and Lute turned his head, fork poised, to look at her back. When she glanced down the counter at him again, he was eating.

Lute had two breakfasts. Finished, he came up to the register to pay his check. "You run a hotel here too?"

"That's what the sign says," Bonnie replied tartly.

"I would like to see your rooms."

Bonnie looked him up and down and said, "You're going slumming, but it's up to you."

She rang up the check, then headed for the stairs, Lute following her. She went up, passed the corridor's three closed doors and opened the door to the end bunkroom. It was clean and empty. Lute stepped past her and gave the place a brief inspection.

"I'd like something else," he said. "More private."

"That's what the other hotel was built for," Bonnie said carelessly.

"You haven't other rooms?"

"No."

Lute didn't say anything, only turned around and started down the hall. He stopped in front of a door and pointed. "This is a room, isn't it?"

"It's mine."

Lute pointed across the hall. "And this is a room also?"

Bonnie said patiently, "One room is mine, one is the boss's and the other room is rented. We only got the big room, I told you."

Lute thought a moment, and said, "I'd like to reserve a bunk in that room for tonight, then."

Bonnie laughed sardonically. "I'll tell the maid to put on the lavender sheets."

She went down ahead of him, and watched him go out. He was a humor-



less man, she thought, not a very pleasant one, and it wasn't because of her mood. She wouldn't even like him on Christmas.

So it was with no feeling at all that she watched him come in an hour later and say, "I've changed my mind. You can cancel my reservation. I am starting back to camp."

"Say hello to the kid for me," Bonnie murmured. "Tell him to sell out high."

Lute scowled. "I don't understand."

"I wonder," Bonnie murmured.

When Saul came in that noon, he didn't speak to Bonnie, and he went out fifteen minutes later without even nodding. By nightfall, Bonnie was in a vile temper. She rowed with the cook, and when Mary, the half-breed waitress, asked for the night off to go to the dance, Bonnie turned on her savagely. She knew what the trouble was, but she couldn't help herself. This being brave when another woman was stealing your man was all right in theory, but it didn't work out.

Saul came in after dark and went out all dressed up and barbered, ready for the dance. Bonnie didn't even see him go, but she knew he was gone. The rush hour passed and eight o'clock came, and the waitresses were idle and sullen. And Bonnie was stubborn. At nine o'clock, she couldn't stand it any longer. She took her coat off the hook and went out. She was going to look in on the dance, anyway, and see her.

Once Bonnie was gone Mary, the waitress, went back into the kitchen to sulk. But the Chinese cook was reading a Chinese paper, and wouldn't even talk to her. The place was deserted, empty.

She wandered out into the restaurant again and tried to read, hating Bonnie all the time. She could have gone to the dance if Bonnie had let her. She thought of the dance and the dresses and of her own dress and then of Bonnie's good-looking clothes. It gave her an idea.



SHE made sure the cook was reading, then tip-toed up the hotel stairs, down the hall, and into Bonnie's room off the corridor. She shut the door behind her, lighted the lamp and went over to the

closet to look inside. The array of dresses pleased her, and she was standing there feasting her eyes when it happened.

She didn't hear the shot, didn't hear the glass break. Something crashed into the back of her head, and that was all.

The cook, hearing her fall, found her lying on the floor, half in and half out of the closet, blood pooling around her cheek.

He sent for Millis and for Saul.

When Millis arrived, he posted a man at the door to keep everyone out. Bonnie and Saul came later, separately, but only seconds apart.

They found Millis and the doctor squatting over the half-breed girl.

Saul took a look at her. His stomach sawed, and he said, "God! What happened?"

Bonnie was behind him. She looked at the girl and was only curious, not minding the blood.

Millis rose. He had put on his coat hurriedly, and it was buttoned crooked. His broad face was grim, and he was still wearing the shell-rimmed glasses that gave him a deceptive air of benevolence.

"Well, she never knew what hit her," he announced. He pointed to the window. "Figure it out for yourself."

Saul walked over to the window and looked at the star-shaped hole in the glass. Outside, down the alley, he could see men with lanterns. Bonnie stood inside the room, still staring at the girl.

Millis had returned to the girl. He said, "Well, doc, I'm through. Where do you want her?"

Afterwards, he went to the foot of the stairs and called for two men, and then came back upstairs. He said to Saul, "Where can we talk?"

Saul and Bonnie took him into the bunk room. They sat at the table, while Millis unbuttoned his coat and shoved his glasses in the pocket. A knock came on the door and a man said, "It was the barbershop shed roof. He scraped the snow clean, so there weren't any tracks."

"No sign?"

"Nothing. Not even the cartridge case."

Millis thanked him and closed the

door. He came over, hands rammed in hip pockets and said suddenly to Saul, "Between me and you, she was chasing around plenty, wasn't she?"

"I don't know," Saul answered.

"I do. She's had the breeds following her like—" His voice trailed off, out of respect to Bonnie.

Bonnie said, "But I don't understand. Why was she killed in my room?"

Millis hauled up abruptly and stared at Bonnie. "Eh? You say it's your room?"

"Yes. What did she want in there?"

Millis still looked at her, his eyes musing, and he was silent for a long time. Then he murmured, "So that's it." He walked slowly over to Bonnie. "Has this girl ever stolen?"

"Not that I know of."

Millis grunted and turned away. He circled the room twice, head bowed in thought, hands rammed in hip pockets. On the third time around he stopped in front of Bonnie and asked idly, "Know anybody that would like to see you dead, Miss Tucker?"

Bonnie opened her mouth in surprise, then said faintly, "See me dead?"

"It's your room," Millis said brusquely. "Your hair is black. From the roof of the barbershop woodshed, all dark women would look alike. Whoever put that shot in there didn't have Mary in mind." He paused. "He had you in mind."

The doctor opened the door then, and said, "Come here a minute, Millis."

Millis went out, leaving Bonnie and Saul alone. Across the table, under the overhead lamp, they looked at each other. Saul finally said, "That's hokey, what Millis said. Who'd shoot at you?"

Bonnie licked her lips and said faintly, "Sure. It's hokey."

But it wasn't. Millis' question was still in her ears. And the answer to it was in her mind. "Bonnie, if you're lying to me, I'll kill you, so help me!" Bruce had said that, and he meant it, and she had lied to him. But he was at Wailing River—or was he? Lute Westock this morning had denied it. Couldn't Bruce be right here now?

Saul said curiously, "Why, Bonnie, you're shivering."

Bonnie was, and not from the chill of the room, either.

## CHAPTER IX

### RECIPE FOR MURDER



IT TOOK Frank and Charlie six and a half days to make it back from the height of land to Lobstick. With no traps to tend they had swung east to the lakes, and had come down the old fur portage to the Raft.

Behind them two days of snow had blotted out their trail. Ahead of them, in Lobstick, Frank didn't know what they'd find.

*"She never knew what hit her."*



The whole town might be in an uproar over Bruce McIvor's disappearance. They even might have investigated Christmas Valley. If Lute had followed instructions to camp with Bruce McIvor's team out on Swan Lake, away from the shack and anyone who might question Bruce's disappearance, they were still reasonably safe. Of course, Christmas Valley was open to any snooper now, but that risk was preferable to having Bruce McIvor free to talk. Frank had made his choice, and time would tell if he had made the right one.

They swung into Lobstick at noon on the tail end of the long snow, and the stores already had men clearing the walks. Frank waved tentatively at a couple of them, and they waved back indifferently. Apparently nobody was looking for him and Charlie. Once, he saw a woman on the sidewalk stop and stare at them as they passed, but that might have been curiosity.

They put up their dogs behind the hotel, got a room, ate their midday meal in the dining room, and still nobody challenged them.

Afterwards, Frank borrowed pen and paper from the desk and went up to his room to write his letter. The mail had gone out yesterday, so he had a whole week in which to write the letter recording his claim. But somehow it seemed imperative to him to get it done. The day for which he had been waiting all these months was approaching.

He rolled a cigarette and leaned back in his chair, match held idly in his hand. For a moment he contemplated the blank sheet of paper, knowing what he was going to write, even down to the phrasing of the letter. He'd spent a hundred nights memorizing it, polishing it, perfecting it. The result was a dry statement of fact, naming corners and locations, along with a note pointing out the forfeiture of the previous claim.

He lighted his cigarette, picked up the pen in his blunt, scarred hands and dipped it in the ink.

There was a knock on the door.

Frank cursed soundlessly and walked across the room, his moccasins making no noise at all.

He opened the door and Corporal Millis, coat under arm, confronted him. Frank managed a civil greeting, and Millis said indifferently, "Busy, Nearing?"

"Nothing that can't wait. Come in."

Millis walked into the room and threw his coat and fur cap on the bed. There was a harried expression lurking in his eyes as he took the old rocker and looked about the room. Frank sat at the desk, watching him drum his fingers on the chair arm, and thought, "This is it; he knows Bruce came to us. Be careful."

Millis said, "Haven't seen you around."

"I'm not much for town," Frank said.

"Heard what's been happening here, then?"

"No. I just got in."

"There's been a murder here since I saw you last."

Frank relaxed, and found he'd been holding his breath. It wasn't trouble, then; Millis just wanted to unburden himself.

Frank asked who had been murdered, and Millis told him a breed girl over at the Star Hotel had been shot, and he related the circumstances.

"Queer thing is," Millis went on, "she was killed by mistake, I think. The shot was intended for Bonnie Tucker, the girl that runs the restaurant. Know her?"

Frank said he didn't, and asked, "Arrested anybody?"

Millis stretched his legs out in front of him and said mildly, "Didn't even have a lead until today." He looked briefly at Frank and then at his boots. "I thought maybe you could help me out."

Frank frowned, puzzled. "I'd be glad to, but how can I?"

Millis tilted his head back and looked at the ceiling, and the faint beginnings of suspicion again stirred within Frank. Millis was circling the subject, but he had his eye on it.

"This Bonnie Tucker saw you and this Indian come into town today. She came right to me."

That was the woman who stared at them on the street, Frank guessed. He

said, "What have I got to do with it?"

"Wait," Millis said. "Let's go back to what she told me. She said she'd been thinking about that girl's death, and how the killer meant that bullet for her. She said there was a man who might kill her if he got mad enough, but she'd thought that man was away from Lobstick when the crime was committed. Now she isn't so sure."

"Who is the man?" Frank asked slowly.

Millis looked at him, then. "Bruce McIvor."

Frank reached over to the desk and carefully doused his cigarette, and when he turned to Millis again, his face was impassive. "And he wasn't away at the time?"

"Was he?" Millis asked gently.

Here it was, Millis knew, and so long as he knew there was no use denying it. The thing to do was quiet Millis' suspicion immediately, before it gathered momentum.

Frank looked at him blankly for several seconds, and then smiled and said, "Oh, I get it. You mean you want to know when I last saw McIvor. It was a week ago. When did the murder happen?"

"Tell me first how long you were with him."

"Six days, a week."

"All the time?"

"Every second. When did the murder happen?"

"During that week," Millis said. "Where is he now?"

"He left my place heading for the height of land," Frank said. It was the truth, but not all of it.

Millis' eyes opened. "The height of land? What's he doing out there?"

"I guess you'd have to ask him," Frank said idly.



THERE was a lot more Millis wanted to ask. He wasn't satisfied and Frank knew it, and he could almost see Millis thinking there were some things here that didn't shape up right. But Frank had answered his questions, and Millis couldn't ask more without exceeding his authority for the present. Millis rose and picked up his coat and fur cap.

"I'll go talk to the girl," Millis said. "You'll be around, won't you?"

"As long as you want me," Frank said easily.

When Millis had gone, Frank sat on the bed, his mind working swiftly. The whole set-up was risky. It reminded him of a sweater, with Millis holding a single thread. If Millis chose to yank that thread, the whole sweater would unravel. He came to his feet and started to pace the floor. Should he get hold of Charlie and warn him? No, Millis would be watching for that, and it would deepen his suspicion. Besides, when Charlie was confronted with strangers he was an Indian again, and he acted like a harmless idiot, silent, sullen, dumb. And Lute? If he had followed orders, he was on Swan Lake, with a dozen snows to cover his trail.

Frank fought down his excitement and tried to think what Millis would do. Millis had to be satisfied with Frank's alibi for Bruce McIvor, since Charlie would back him up. But would his curiosity and suspicion prod him on to asking questions about Bruce's whereabouts that Frank couldn't or wouldn't answer?

And immediately, Frank was reminded of the job which Millis interrupted. The letter was the most important thing. Once that was off, he could lie, deceive, and stall for the precious week he needed. Afterwards, the truth could out and nobody would be harmed.

He sat down at the desk and carefully wrote out his claim. He had finished when there was a timid knock on the door. It was the clerk, who said, "Corporal Millis asked if you'd step over to the Star Hotel."

Frank thanked him and said he was on his way. He shrugged into his parka and went downstairs, got an envelope and stamp and addressed and mailed his letter.

Afterwards, he cut across the street to the Star. The waitress directed him upstairs to the bunkroom. The door was closed and when he knocked Millis' voice bid him enter.

He stepped inside. The overhead lamp was lighted against the dusk, and around the table beneath it sat Kelcy McIvor and a girl Frank did not know. Millis

had just turned from the window. Charlie, holding a thin cigarette between his fingers, was seated on the bunk. Frank did not look at him. He spoke to Kelcy, and then Millis introduced him to Bonnie Tucker, who barely nodded to him. She was a handsome, vivid girl with a sullen defiance in her eyes, but beside Kelcy's blond, calm serenity, she seemed lush and hard. Frank pulled off his parka while Millis sank into one chair, and kicked another toward Frank.

"It's too cold to keep running from one of you to the next," Millis said bluntly. "Besides, I want you all together, where I can remember what you're saying. Miss Tucker, you came to see me this afternoon. Tell them why."

Kelcy's golden hair caught light from the lamp and glowed with a live sheen as she watched Bonnie.

"If you want her to hear, I should worry," Bonnie said to Willis. She turned to look at Kelcy then. "I told Millis I think Bruce killed that girl, thinking it was me."

"Bruce?" Kelcy echoed faintly. Then her voice firmed. "That's not so! Why would he want to kill you?"

Bonnie's lip lifted faintly. "You're asking for it, so here goes. Bruce was jealous of Saul. He told me once if he thought Saul would take me from him, he'd kill me. Well, Saul's my man, always has been, and the kid knows it. How do you like that?"

"I don't mind it at all," Kelcy said angrily, her face flushed, "except that it doesn't explain anything."

"No?" Bonnie looked at Frank and then back at Kelcy. "Where was Bruce the night Mary was killed?"

"Hunting, wasn't he?"

"He was not. He was leaving for Nearing's on Wailing River, so he said. But Nearing and that Siwash came in today without him. Then where is Bruce?"

Both Kelcy and Bonnie looked at Frank. "He was up there a week with me," Frank explained. "He was with me when that girl was killed."

"Who says so?" Bonnie asked sharply. "You do, and maybe that Siwash does. I don't believe it."

"Why would they lie for him?" Millis asked slowly.

Bonnie looked searchingly at Frank. "He knows. Ask him what Bruce talked about when he got up there."



FOR a moment Frank stared at her, and then his face got stiff with anger. The recorder's letter! She knew, too. He said softly, angrily, swiftly, "Bruce is still loose, Miss Tucker. Maybe you better be careful of what he wouldn't want known."

"What's that?" Millis said sharply.

Frank kept looking at Bonnie. "Ask her. She seems to know."

"Nothing," Bonnie said sullenly, after a long pause.

Millis looked from Bonnie to Frank, and back to Bonnie, a hard exasperation in his face.

"Somebody better make sense about this," he said grimly. "I don't care which one of you does it, either."

"I don't either," Bonnie said defiantly. "All I want to tell you is that Bruce was the one who shot that girl! I tell you, it couldn't have been anybody else but him!"

"Wrong," Frank murmured.

"You're a liar!" Bonnie said hotly.

Frank shrugged, and glanced at Kelcy. She was watching him with an unblinking, breathless concentration.

Then Kelcy said, "This argument doesn't make sense. If Bruce was with Nearing when Mary Paulin was killed, he couldn't have killed her."

"But was he?" Bonnie said sharply. "Where is he?"

Kelcy looked at Frank. "Where is he?"

"Across the height of land," Frank said.

A subtle, indefinable suspicion crept into Kelcy's eyes. "The height of land? Why is he back there?"

"You'd better ask him," Frank said shortly. "He stayed with us a week, then headed for the height of land."

"When?" Bonnie asked.

"A week ago."

"After the murder!" Bonnie said triumphantly, looking at Millis. "Doesn't that prove he's running away?"

Frank said flatly, with what he hoped

was finality, "He wasn't outside my sight for a week, I tell you." He turned and said to Charlie, "Tell them, Charlie."

"He was with us," Charlie said softly.

Frank glanced at the others. Bonnie was regarding Millis with a challenging glance, and Millis looked angrily bewildered. Only Kelcy was looking at Frank; she had never taken her glance from him.

She said calmly, "Bruce hated the bush, and he hated you! He wouldn't go to your place or back to the height of land. Where is he?"

"See?" Bonnie jeered.

Kelcy turned on Bonnie and spoke passionately. "You little fool, keep still! Bruce didn't shoot at you, and you know it! We all do! I'm trying to find out where he is!"

Millis said flatly, "Keep quiet, both of you."

There was a long onrunning silence, during which Kelcy never took her eyes from Frank. Then she said flatly, "Something has happened to Bruce."

Frank's eyes glinted unpleasantly.

"Be careful," he said softly.

"I tell you, something has happened to Bruce," Kelcy repeated defiantly. She looked at Millis now.

A hot anger stirred in Frank. This girl's persistence was slowly and surely dragging him into real danger. He could tell Millis about Bruce peddling strychnine, and watch Kelcy squirm. And then he was ashamed of the thought, and still angry.

Kelcy stood up now, real alarm in her face. "Bruce hasn't been home for more than two weeks! Bonnie says he started for Nearing's, and Nearing admits he saw him! And now Bruce is gone—back to the height of land! I don't believe it. Corporal Millis, I've got a right to ask you to find Bruce!"

"All right, all right," Millis said patiently.

"But it's not all right!" Kelcy cried. "What if they've murdered him! What if his body is lying in the snow right now up by Nearing's shack? How do you know it isn't?"

"Why would Nearing kill him?" Millis asked savagely. "Why in hell would he want to!"

Kelcy's glance shuttled to Frank. Here it comes, Frank thought; she'll spill it all. She'll tell him about Lute's blackmail of her, and my blackmail of Bruce. And Millis will bust it wide open, the mine and all of it.

A kind of fear came into Kelcy's eyes then, and vanished, and Frank waited breathlessly for her to go on.

"I don't know," she said grimly. "But I know something is terribly wrong! Bruce hated the bush! If a person is lost, you have to look for them, don't you?"

Millis sighed. Frank felt relief flood over him and make him weak. She was afraid to tell the whole story. But her stubborn insistence that Millis look for Bruce was almost as bad. He'd have to stop that; he'd have to take her to Bruce before her fear for his safety overcame her fear for his good name. Above all, he must keep them away from Christmas Valley.

There was derision in his voice as he said, "I'd be glad to guide you. He's probably at Weymarn's crossing at this moment. It's ten days or two weeks by dog team, but go have a look."

"Make him prove it," Kelcy said swiftly to Millis.

Millis glared at Frank. "Is he there?"

"He's there," Frank said bitterly, "but have I got to bring back his ear to prove it?"

Kelcy ignored that, and talked to Millis. "Just what do I have to do to make you find Bruce?"

Millis sighed. "Any reasonable proof that he's lost will start a search party. But is he lost?"

Kelcy said swiftly, "I don't know, but I know something has happened to him. He's not strong enough to cross the height of land. He can't hunt like a bush trapper! He couldn't make it there. If he isn't there, will Frank Nearing be arrested?"

"One thing at a time," Millis said wearily. "Let me think."



BUT Kelcy couldn't be stopped. All the weeks of bitter wonder where Bruce was, all of Saul's easy assurances that secretly she had come to dis-

believe, all the worry and all the fear had burst the dam of her reticence. She said swiftly, "Look, Corporal Millis. If dad pays the cost of a plane, can we fly over to Weymarn's? If it takes two weeks to get there by dog team, he may be dead!"

Millis was baffled. Her fear was close to stampeding him, but when he reasoned it away, there was still some doubt left. He looked at her, at the silent pleading in her face, and came to a decision.

"Of course we can fly. I'll radio out tonight for a plane if your dad insists."

Kelcy straightened up and looked at Frank "And you'll come with us."

She went out the door. Frank rose and followed her out. At the head of the stairwell, he caught up with her. She turned to face him there, and he could not see her face.

"Beautiful," he said wryly, his voice shaky with anger, "Go ahead with it. Only remember one thing. Miss McIvor, and I'll give it to you with the bark on. I took Bruce over to the height of land. I admit it. He's safe there. But if he doesn't keep his mouth shut when we reach him, I'll turn him up!"

There was a long silence, then Kelcy said in a harsh, unbending voice, "All right. If I find Bruce, it's all I care about."

Millis opened the door then, and the shaft of light from the room showed Frank Kelcy's face. It was grim and strained and afraid, and she went down the stairs. Frank walked back for his parka. Millis met him in the hall, and Millis hauled up beside him.

"Remember what I told you that night in my office, Nearing?" he asked. His broad face was stern, his eyes heavy with censure.

"I remember."

"Well, you're paying for turning down some good advice. The hell of it is,

I'm paying for you, too. What did you take McIvor over there for?"

"I never said I did."

Millis glared at him, baffled and angry.

"What did he come up to see you for?"

"He—just came."

"You're dodging something," Millis said grimly. "I'll find out what it is, too, before I'm finished. Now I want a straight answer to this question. Could Bruce have killed Mary Paulin?"

"Not possibly."

Millis grunted and went on down the stairs.

Frank stepped into the room. Bonnie was still seated at the table, and she was watching him. Frank put on his parka and came over to the table, looking across it down at her.

"I meant what I said about Bruce," he murmured. "He didn't do it."

Bonnie said bitterly, "I wish I'd read that letter Bruce stole when I had the chance. I'd know soon enough if you were lying for him because he had something on you."

Frank wanted to laugh with relief, then. She didn't know what was in the recorder's letter after all; she'd been bluffing, and bluffing well.

But her suspicion had led to this questioning, and this questioning to Kelcy's panic, which would lead to their finding Bruce. And he was just where he had started back in the shack. Bruce wouldn't talk about the mine; he'd be afraid to with the mail robbery charge hanging over him. Kelcy would stop him. But he would be back where liquor and friends might pry it out of him, and the old risk was there.

Frank said wryly, "Some day you'll come to me and say you're sorry for this. I'll laugh at it then, but it isn't very funny now, sister. It isn't funny at all."

(to be continued)

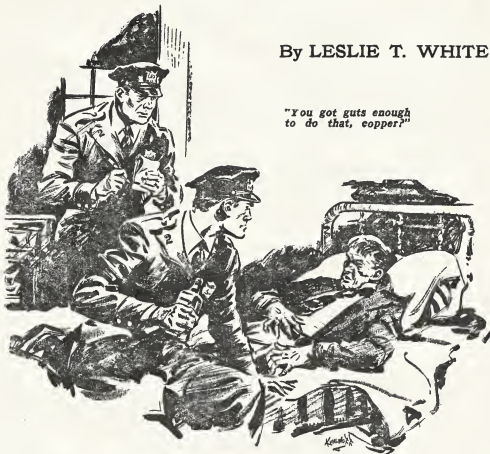




# RADIO PATROL

By LESLIE T. WHITE

*"You got guts enough  
to do that, copper?"*



**T**HINGS wouldn't have turned out the way they did if I hadn't met Karen in the first place, so it really began six months ago, when I was transferred out of Traffic to the Mott Street precinct and assigned with Sam Brace to radio patrol car 23.

That was a good spot for a young cop just finished with his probation, for it was in Alderman Carmichael's own district, and "Uncle Terry" Carmichael had boomed me for my job. The beat was the section along the river we called Dogtown, and not far from headquarters, so that's how I came to meet Karen.

Every day at four o'clock, when 23 started the evening shift, we had to take the daily reports from the precinct down to Central Stationhouse before we

went in service, and Karen Marshall was the chief of detective's private secretary. It took me those six months to meet her properly and convince her that I would be a good marital risk.

Captain Rivers himself helped a little in that—he gave me a good word now and again, and a good word, even now and again, from Old Man Rivers was manna from Heaven.

This Wednesday night I brought the sheaf of reports in about four-twenty and dumped them on Karen's desk. I always brought them in, even when it was my week to drive, because my partner, Sam Brace, knew how it was, and if he didn't think too much of the arrangement, he kept his mouth shut. Sam usually kept his mouth shut. In any other guy it would be sulkiness, but Sam

Brace was born that way. In six months I never got to feel I knew the guy.

Karen was excited when I came up. She had a misty look in her eyes that did things to me. I didn't intend to tarry long at her desk because the door into Cap. River's office was open and I got a glimmer of him hunched like a polar bear over his desk. So I just whispered: "See you tonight when I come off duty, hon?" and was turning away when the old man shouted:

"Is that the pest from Dogtown?"

Karen jumped. "It's Patrolman Starr, Captain Rivers."

"Send him in here!" roared the skipper, so I went on in.

Captain Rivers was a big guy who had been a cop for thirty years. He reminded me of an English bulldog—tough-featured and with a vicious bark, but actually a friendly, easy-going guy.

"Look, Starr," he barked in my face. "Every time I look out that door I see you standing around like you work here. I had an idea you were in the uniformed division."

"Yes, sir. I am, sir."

"Well, I can't have harness bulls littering up this detective bureau. So if you want to hang around here, you'll have to climb out of that uniform and start your loafing at eight in the morning."

I didn't catch on at all until Karen touched my arm.

"Lucky," she whispered. "Captain Rivers is taking you into the detective bureau."

The Old Man roared with laughter. "Okay, Starr. I've already spoken to your precinct commander. We'll give you a try in the bureau here. You start Monday. Now beat it."



I WALKED out on air. Karen promised to drive her roadster around to the Mott Street stationhouse and pick me up when I came off duty at midnight. When I got out to the radio car I didn't say anything right away because I didn't know how Brace would take it. He's peculiar, especially if he thinks a guy has any drag.

He can't be blamed for that. There's

been a lot of stool-pigeons right in the department and it got so bad about a year ago that the Grand Jury put on a special investigator named Chester Sloane to check up on the rumors of graft and political patronage. Sloane was murdered by Tony Jarcho, a two-time loser who at this time was to be executed in a couple of days for the killing.

Brace was driving this week—we alternate—and nothing was said until about seven-thirty o'clock, when we took time out to grab a sandwich at Benny's lunch wagon. It's a lousy place to eat, but we can run the car right up close to the windows and by dialing up the radio volume, get our calls without going *out-of-service*.

"You're in a swell trance tonight," Sam observed dryly. "How do you take it? In the arm?"

"I snuff it up," I told him. "Starting Monday I work in civies."

Sam was quiet through two more cups of coffee, and I felt sorry for him. Sam's married, with five kids, and he's been in harness for thirteen years. If he's not the brightest guy in the world, at least he's a good cop. I hated to toss my promotion into his face like that.

"Well, Lucky, that's swell," he said after a while. "You got what it takes, kid. Looks, ambition—and friends."

"I wish you were coming with me, Sam."

He shook his head. "Not me, kid. I'm waiting for only one thing—my pension. It's okay for you, but I'd only get messed up in the bureau. I want to be left in a quiet spot, like Dogtown, where nothing's going to take that pension away from me. With you, Lucky, it's different. Single, you got the world by the tail."

"I'm going to be married, Sam."

He gave me a sidelong glance. "Oh, sure. The chief's secretary." He paused. "No, I didn't mean that like it sounds. You'll do all right, Lucky."

"Come on," I said, "let's get the hell out of here."

We rolled then, and I didn't feel like talking. Sam never does, so it was pretty quiet. I had a sick ache in my diaphragm, like something was going to

happen, and I couldn't help thinking of Sam and his pension. You couldn't have slid a nightstick between us, sitting there together in the front seat of number 23, yet we were a thousand miles apart, for some reason. In the past few weeks Sam had started to warm up a little, but now he was gone for good. I knew that.

We drove down by the pool hall. There was a fight going on inside, so we busted that up. We shook down a trio of Portuguese and Sam found a piece of lead pipe in one guy's pocket. The guy had just got himself a job after being on relief for five months, so Sam cuffed him around a bit instead of pinching him and making him lose his job. Afterward we rolled past the Athletic-Social Club. It was quiet down there. We were circling Front Street when we got the call:

*"Calling car 23, calling car 23. Proceed rooming house 1267 Dock Street. Sick man. Repeat. Calling car 23. . ."*

Sam whipped her through a U-turn and in under a minute and a half we slid to the curb in front of a dirty tenement rooming house about a block from the Fish Market. I hit the joint first and the landlady directed me to a front room on the third floor.

"'E gyve me th' nyme of Brown," she told me. "'E cyme in early this mornin'. I don't know nothin' about 'im an' I don't want no trouble." With that she went about her business.



SAM came in by the time she was finished, so we went up together. We could smell the blood the minute we opened the door of the third floor room, even before we could see the guy, for the lights were out, and all the windows were closed tight. I switched on a ten watt drop-light and prodded open the window.

The guy was a mess. He was fully dressed, even to his shoes, and he was all wrapped up in the gray sheets like a mummy. His eyes were closed, but he was groaning weakly. We unwound him. He had five bullet holes in his stomach, and he'd evidently poured a bottle of gin over his shirt to try and

prevent infection. He was hunched into a kind of a knot when we found him, but by the time we got him straightened and unwound, he was limp and quiet.

"He ain't sick," Sam observed. "He's dead. I better phone the coroner for the meat wagon."

I loosened the guy's tie and belt and tore the front out of his shirt. I had taken a course in first aid when I used to drive a telephone company truck, so I listened to his chest.

"He's still breathing," I said.

Sam don't like smells and blood.

"I'll go call in for an ambulance," he volunteered. "An' I'll bet they haven't got a phone in this joint."

"It better get here quick."

Sam took it on the jump and I tried to make the guy as comfortable as you can make a guy with a bellyful of lead slugs in him. There was still one good drink in the gin bottle, so I started massaging the muscles at the back of his neck with one hand while I poured the stuff down his throat with the other. He was a ratty looking punk with lifeless gray hair, a bald spot in the middle, and a soft, baggy face underneath. He looked like he had never been out in the sun. He had a two-wave permanent in his nose and a slit of a mouth, set off-center. He looked about forty.

I suddenly realized his eyes were open and he was staring at me. It startled me so I let go of his neck and stood up. His eyes were smoky and red-streaked around the whites, but they were very intense. I had the sensation he was raising his head and his eyes were coming up off the bed right at me.

His lips didn't move any more than a ventriloquist's. "Where'd you come from, copper?"

"Take it easy, chum," I said. "You got stomach trouble. We'll have a doc here in a couple of minutes."

"I don't need a doc," he said. "I need a priest." His eyes brightened a moment like a light bulb just before it burns out. "Hey, cop, don't go way. I want to ask you something."

"I'm right here beside you," I said.

"I can't see you." Then he said a funny thing. "Cop, have they hung Toby Jarcho yet?"

"Not yet," I said. "He dances Saturday."

He started to toss around on the bed. "Why'd you turn out the light? It's dark in here."

The light was still on. I said so. That quieted him.

"I'm gonna die!" he moaned. "I'm gonna die. Ain't I?"

"Yes, you're going to die. Tell me who shot you?"

He laughed up a little red fringe of foam around his lips. "Tell a cop! Tell a cop, when Terry Carmichael runs the cops."

"What's Carmichael got to do with it?" I asked him.

"He . . . he fixed me like this."

"Alderman Carmichael? You say *he* shot you?"

The little guy burbled again. "He had me rubbed out like he did Sloane. The dirty louse! He wanted a goat so he got us to frame Tony Jarcho for it, then never paid off. But I'll fool him—I'll tell the newspapers. Hey, cop! You still there?"

I told him I was still there, and doing plenty of listening.

"Then get me some reporters," he panted. "I got a story for 'em. What the hell do I care now? They can't hang me. They don't hang dead guys. Sure, we killed Chet Sloane for Carmichael. Sloane would have hooked Carmichael for graft. Let 'em print that! That'll fix up Uncle Terry an' his stooge Rivers."

I took off my cap and sat on the edge of the bed, wiping sweat from my face. Sloane was the Grand Jury investigator for whose murder Tony Jarcho was to hang in two days. I bent over so I could catch his words, for his voice was getting furry.

"Now take it easy," I urged. "You're going to die, so let's get this straight. What's your name?"

"What the hell difference does that make to you? Go get some reporters who'll do something."

"I'll do something, fella."

"Then stop 'em from hangin' Tony," he said. "He's got an old woman to look after. An' make Terry Carmichael pony up the money he owes me. Send

it to Jarcho's old woman. You got guts enough to do that, copper?"

I nodded grimly. "You admit *you* shot Sloane? Was Jarcho with you?"

"No, no. Tony was heistin' a floatin' crap game downtown when mc'n Little Joe took care of Sloane," the man blurted. "Now Little Joe give me the same. . . . I says to. . . . Say, I'm fallin'!" He clutched at my sleeve. "Hang on to me! Hang on . . . I!"

He died then.



I GOT up off the bed and found Sam Brace standing behind me in the murky half-light. His face was tight and the jaw line stood out prominently.

"You heard what he said, Sam?"

Brace gave me a long, slow look before he deliberately shook his head.

"I didn't hear a thing."

I looked from Sam to the dead guy and back to Sam again. "Sure you did! What's the idea! You heard him say how he knocked off Sloane at Carmichael's order."

"No," Sam said grimly. "I didn't hear nothing like that. An' you're a damn fool if you did." He turned on his heel and tramped down the stairs.

I stuck around until the ambulance wheeled up. The interne was sore when he found the guy was dead, because he had wanted to get away early to a party at his wife's sister's. So he flounced out and I had to stay there until the coroner sent his meat wagon around for the body. Then the dicks arrived and took charge. Nobody asked me if the dead guy had said anything before he passed out.

Sam was sitting behind the wheel smoking a cigarette when I came out of the house. Without looking up he stepped on the starter, and when I slid into the seat, he eased in the clutch and tooled us into motion. We rode around a couple of blocks that way without a word.

"Sam," I said when the silence began getting on my nerves, "you really heard what that guy said back in the room. You came in when he was still talking."

"That guy was unconscious when I came in the first time, and dead when

I got back. For all I know he never opened his mouth."

"Why, Sam?"

"That's the way it was," Sam said.

"Okay, then I'll tell you what he said. He confessed Terry Carmichael hired him to. . ."

Sam stopped me. "Listen, Lucky, I'm not interested."

"But damn it, Sam! The State's going to hang Tony Jarcho for a killing this guy here confesses *he* committed. Don't you get it? Jarcho didn't kill Chet Sloane! This guy did!"

"Tony Jarcho is a loser an' a rat."

"Maybe. But he didn't kill Sloane! And this guy said Terry Carmichael. . ."

Sam reached over and turned up the radio so he couldn't hear what I was saying. When it stopped squawking for a minute, he said:

"Lucky, I got a wife an' five kids to think about. Only a few hours ago I told you I was only interested in one thing—my pension. I can't get jammed up in a lot of crooked politics. This town stinks in a lot of spots. Look now—I ain't ever tried to give you nor anybody else advice. I mind my business. But be smart, Lucky. You got a swell chance on the department. Uncle Terry got you your job; he's your friend. . ."

"He's not a personal friend. He's our alderman, so I asked him for a job."

"Okay, but he got it for you. Old Man Rivers likes you. You're goin' to be a detective. You got a girl. Okay, then. Why chuck it?"

"That guy confessed to a killing, didn't he? I'm a cop, ain't I? I got to put down what I heard in my report!"

Brace shrugged. "Okay. Only leave me out of it."

That made me so sore I just sat there in a black mood. Then we got a call to ferry a couple of drunks to the stationhouse and after that an ambulance follow-up to a wreck. It was a quarter after midnight when we went out of service and headed for the stationhouse. Still we hadn't said anything more about the dead guy with the five slugs in his stomach.

On the way in, I brought it up again. "What did you mean by chuckin' my chances, Sam?"

"Just don't start anything you can't finish, Lucky. Suppose you blow your top about some wild story that guy gave you. So what? You'll stir up a big smell an' prove nothin'. Maybe the guy said he shot Sloane. Well, suppose he'd said he shot Abe Lincoln, or Jesse James? You'd laugh it off. But you stir up a lot of scandal about Uncle Terry an' Old Man Rivers and you'll get everybody on the department down on you. No, Lucky, don't do it."

"But if Jarcho didn't murder Sloane, he shouldn't hang for it."

Sam's voice took on an edge. "Have it your own way, but I'm tellin' you, leave me out of it. I didn't hear nothin', an' I doubt if you did." And then he slammed old 23 into the patrol alley and hopped out.

We went into the stationhouse and found Karen talking to Sergeant Cline. I told her I'd be ready as soon as I made out my report, and started to walk by, but the sergeant calls: "Don't keep a lady waitin', Lucky. Brace can make out the reports. He's in no hurry; he's married."

Sam paused and looked straight at me. "Go ahead, Lucky. Enjoy yourself while you're able. I'll make out the report."



I WOULD have spilled the thing right then if Karen hadn't been standing there.

She took my arm and the sergeant waved us out as Brace walked into the assembly room.

We climbed into Karen's roadster and she drove.

"Let's go somewhere and celebrate, Lucky," she said, squeezing my arm. "Oh, I'm so happy tonight!"

"Any place you say. Only I'm in uniform."

"I don't mind. I love your uniform, Lucky. We'll keep it as a souvenir now that you are practically a detective. Oh, I'm so proud of you!"

We went to a chop suey parlor down by the Bay. While we were waiting for our order and drinking tea and reading those crazy fortunes you get in rice-cakes, Karen suddenly reached over and put her hand on mine.

"What's happened, Lucky? You're trembling!"

"We had a messy case tonight. I'm sorry. Guess maybe I'm just hungry."

She let it go at that, and talked about the thing I usually like best to hear about, our getting married. "Captain Rivers asked me if I wouldn't stay on as his secretary for a while when we were married, Lucky," she said. "I told him you had rather definite ideas on the subject, but that I would ask you. After all, Lucky, he has been like a father to us, getting you that nice boost. . . ."

"Yeah, I know. You engineered that. didn't you?"

"Lucky! That doesn't sound like you."

"I'm sorry, hon. You like Cap Rivers a lot, don't you? I mean, he's important to you."

Karen nodded. "I do, and he is. There's something so rock-like about him, like a stabilizer in this police work. He keeps me from becoming a cynic. Rather he did until I fell in love with you, my Lucky Starr."

That's a pun I don't like, but I managed to grin. The Chink brought in the chow mein then, so we stopped talking. But it was preying on my mind, so after a while I asked her: "Was Jarcho's last appeal denied, d'you know? Does he dance on Saturday morning?"

She nodded affirmatively. "His lawyer has given up the fight. Let's not talk about executions tonight, Lucky. They make me a little sick."

"They make me a lot sicker!" I shouted suddenly, pushing my plate aside. Then I told her, I told her the whole rotten story about the guy with the five slugs in his stomach, what he had said, and what Sam Brace had said. And there was no more chow mein eaten by either of us that night.

She never opened her mouth until I had finished, then, "What are you going to do?" she asked huskily.

"Do? If Tony Jarcho's innocent, there's only one thing to do. Blow it out in the open."

"Lucky! Do you realize what you are doing? You'll ruin Captain Rivers. You'll hurt Uncle Terry Carmichael."

I felt sick, sick and scared. "You

don't think that I should let an innocent guy hang. . . ."

She leaned across the table and took my hand. "Lucky, I love you. We've planned our future together. I'm hungry to marry you and have a home and be happy. That's the most important thing in life to me."

"You sound like Brace and his damned pension."

"And his wife and his five kids. If you had any family in the world, you'd understand," she reminded me. "Oh, Lucky, please think of me, of us! You'll be broken and thrown off the department if you stir up a scandal. Anyway, it's not true. Captain Rivers would never let a thing like that happen. I don't believe it. The man was lying."

"Men don't lie on the brink of eternity. Karen."

She was crying now. "Well, I don't care. I don't care about anything but you." She controlled herself abruptly and the line of her chin stiffened. "Lucky, if you dare give that lie to the papers, I'm through. Now please take me home."

I took her home and left her at the door. I kissed her, but it didn't take. Then I climbed back in her car to drive it the four blocks to the garage where she kept it. But I didn't start right away. I sat there. The lights went on in Karen's apartment on the fifth floor, then after a long time they went out, and I was still there smoking a chain of cigarettes.

Sometimes there didn't seem to be any sense to it. The guy with the five slugs in him was dead now. In forty-eight hours Tony Jarcho would be jerked out of existence. He hadn't done much with his life while he had it anyhow.

He was a crook, an all-around louse. By the dead guy's own statement, Tony was heisting a floating crap game at the time of the killing. So why worry about a guy like that? Why tear the heart out of a girl, wreck my own career, and dirty up the two guys in this world who were trying to do something for me? Suppose Terry Carmichael was dipping his fingers into the pie? Was that my business? A lot of politicians let sugar stick to their thumbs. No, Lucky, be a

good sensible guy and go home and sleep it off. Marry the girl, and let Uncle Terry boom you to a captaincy.

But Tony Jarcho. The ticking of my wrist watch, the one Karen had given me on my birthday, was pulling Jarcho to the gallows. It must be tough enough when you're guilty to sit there in Death Row with a fat screw outside the bars, your head in your hands and meditate on the coming moment when the gallows floor folds out from under you. But when you're innocent . . . ?



THE State pen was just under seventy miles away. It was two-thirty A.M. when I started. It was about seven minutes after four when I wheeled the roadster up to the gate.

There was some little trouble about the hour, but when they woke up the deputy warden, he passed me inside and the night sergeant took me into the death house. It was a long walk. There was a little blond guy stretched naked on his bunk, tearing his heart out with long, dry sobs. They had taken his clothes away because he'd tried to hang himself. The State wanted to hang him. Then there was a big colored boy who pressed his face close to the bars and hummed spirituals. I never heard anything on the radio like it, but still they were going to garrote that beautiful voice with hemp. There were three or four other guys, little insignificant punks who tried to set off too many firecrackers in their day. Then the turnkey locked me in with Tony Jarcho.

Tony was a dumpy little grease-ball with wavy hair and a spade chin. His eyes were puffed with fear until they resembled a couple of cue balls. He looked at my face, then slowly over my uniform.

"Tony, my name's Starr," I said. "I'm a radio patrol cop. I stumbled onto some stuff tonight and, well, I want to ask you a couple of questions."

"My mouthpiece told me not to talk," he said, without conviction.

"Your mouthpiece has quit worrying about you, Tony. Look, now—you claim you didn't knock off Sloane. If that's

level, where were you at the time?"

"I was with friends," Jarcho said.

I got up. "Okay, punk. G'wan and dance. Have your fun. I had a tip-off you were sticking up a crap game, but if you'd rather hang. . . ."

He broke then. He hadn't wanted to use the stickup even as an alibi, because of the habitual criminal law. It would automatically send him up for life, and his lawyer had advised him to clam-up and wait for a break. So he told me all about the stick-up, and gave me the names of a couple of local hot-shots who were in the game. I knew they wouldn't testify in court on the grounds of incriminating themselves in a crime, but maybe it could be worked through the immunity angle of a Grand Jury investigation. Then I asked him about a guy known as Little Joe.

His eyes popped even wider. "Sure, it was Little Joe Fay who tipped me off to the crap game. He's a pal."

"Yeah, he must be." I described the guy who had died with the five slugs in his stomach.

He thought a minute. "That's Lightweight. He used to be a fighter a long time ago. We call him Lightweight, but his name is Bonnier. He was a rod-man during Prohibition."

About Sloane, the slain investigator, he knew nothing. But he did know that some of the boys were worried; he'd heard them talk a lot about it. And he didn't want to die. He didn't, he didn't. . . .



I DROVE straight back to the city and ran Karen's car into the garage. A bath and a change to civies steadied me a little; then I went downtown and tried to make up my mind what to do next. I was pretty sure now that Lightweight Bonnier had given me the truth before he died. At the station there was a note for me that Alderman Carmichael had called me twice between eight-thirty and ten. It was nearly ten-thirty now. I tore up the note, then changed my mind. I went over to his office.

There were about a dozen people waiting, but his secretary took me in almost at once. Terry Carmichael was a



genial, good-natured little fat guy. He'd been a politician since before I was born.

"Hello, Lucky, hello, hello!" he boomed, pumping my hand. "I didn't mean to drag you way over here. Just wanted to congratulate you, boy. Captain Rivers tells me he has drafted you into the detective bureau. Well, I told him a long time ago to keep his eyes on you."

It's a wonder I hadn't noticed Carmichael's eyes before. They didn't laugh with the rest of his face.

"Thanks for that," I said. Somehow I couldn't bring myself to call him Uncle Terry this time, like he wanted to be called.

If he noticed, he said nothing about it. "That's fine, that's fine. Friends are the only thing worth while in this world, my boy. You can always count on Uncle Terry." He patted my shoulder and steered me out.

Back at the station I tried to get a line on Little Joe Fay. The record bureau had a report on him as long as your arm, and I found out that he was still on parole. But he wasn't due to report for five or six days, and that would be too late to do Tony Jarcho any good, unless I blasted the whole thing out in the open and won him a reprieve. But before I did that, I wanted to grab Little Joe Fay. So a couple of the dicks put the tap on their stools and promised something in a hurry.

Meanwhile I dug up one of the gamblers, a horse-faced guy named Sykes, who had sat in the floating crap game Jarcho heisted the night Chet Sloane was murdered. He just laughed at me when I asked him if he had recognized the guy who had done the stick-up.

"Don't be a chump, Starr. Me, in a crap game? Tsk-tsk! Why, copper, I'm in the real estate business. I go to bed every night at nine-thirty. Sorry I can't give you any information."

I put my fist in my pocket to keep from taking a poke at him.

"Look, you heel," I said. "You know damn well you had a stake in that game. Tony Jarcho stuck that up and now he hangs Saturday morning for a murder.

Sykes was very polite.

"So they tell me," he said, and that was as far as I could get with him.

I was feeling mighty listless by the time I got back to Mott Street. It was nearly three o'clock and I went on shift at four. This wasn't the first night I'd missed my sleep, but it had never got me like this before. One of the boys in the robbery squad called me aside.

"Say, Lucky, you must have something hot on Little Joe Fay. I put the squeeze on three of my stools and couldn't draw flies. They clammed right up."

The other boys drew the same hands. No dice. Little Joe was too close to the throne and none of the stools wanted to risk it. So about three-thirty I started out of the stationhouse to change my clothes. There was a message for me to call Karen, but I put it off. Before I reached the corner, a little weasel sidled out of a drug store and said:

"Hello, Lucky. You lookin' for Little Joe?"

"So what?"

"He's leaving town," the guy said. "But about three-forty he's going to stop at the *Tip Top Apartments* to say good-by to his doll. The apartment is 312, and this broadcast ought to be worth a saw-buck to a cop."

I gave him ten dollars and a good look so I'd know him again if it was a sell-out. I turned to go back to the station and leave word for Brace, but a look at my watch showed it was twenty-five to four right now. So I ran into the street and flagged a cruising cab.



THE *Tip Top* was a quiet spot on a side street. There wasn't any doorman, and unless you had a key you couldn't get into the building unless one of the tenants buzzed open the front door with the automatic controls. I didn't have a key and the last thing I wanted to do was announce myself to the party in 312, so I fingered about a dozen buttons, anyone except 312.

Somebody set off the buzzer and I pushed inside and walked up the stairs to the third floor. I wasn't too sure of my plans, but I'd been a cop just about long enough to know you can't tell what to expect in advance.

A redhead with the makings of a double chin opened the door of 312 as though she expected somebody, and she tried to close it quick when she saw me. But I pushed it open and walked in. I didn't see anybody that fitted the description of Little Joe Fay, but there were two boys sitting in the living room and they seemed to be waiting for somebody also. I made a casual movement with my hand and one of them produced a gun and said: "Don't bother, copper," very firmly, and I knew the guy they had been waiting for was me.

The redhead put on her hat and coat and went out. One of the pair made a patting motion with his hand so I took the hint and sat down. I felt sick in the pit of my stomach, but it wasn't from fear. It was the feeling that I'd been sap enough to blunder into about as simple a trap as was ever laid for a rookie cop.

"Put that piece of pipe away," I growled at the guy with the gun. "Where's Little Joe?"

"He's comin'," said the hood. "You're in no hurry, flatfoot."

"You won't be either, when I get you down to the stationhouse," I promised him. And then the door opened again and the redhead came back in with a tall, swarthy guy. He was much better looking than his mug picture in the Record Bureau, but it was still Little Joe Fay.

"Hello, Lucky," he said. "Heard you were looking for me. What's the beef?"

I sat there feeling like a third rate heel. Things I had never thought much about suddenly became clear. I saw the difference between punks like the pair opposite me, and Little Joe Fay. Fay had the same varnish that glossed Terrence Carmichael; he could slap you on the back with one hand and knife you with the other. I knew, too, that I wasn't much of a cop. The difference hadn't been very obvious to me before.

"Get rid of these punks," I told Little Joe.

At his nod the two hoods rose and filed out of the room.

"Wait in the hall," he told them. The redhead stayed put on the edge of her chair, swinging a lot of leg.

"Lightweight was tougher than you figured, Joe," I said. "Five slugs couldn't stop him from talking."

"I'll remember that," Joe said. "I heard you were looking for me?"

"They're hangin' Tony Jarcho tomorrow." It sounded silly, me saying that, and the redhead giggled.

"You went up to the Big House to see him, they tell me. Relative of yours?" When I didn't say anything, his manner turned brisk. "Say, what's wrong with you, Lucky? You tryin' to get out of line, or make a name for yourself? Word got around that you were a right cop. Are you dumb, or something?"

"I'm dumb," I admitted. "So what?" It was funny talking to him like he might have been a friend, or business associate instead of a killer.

Little Joe lighted a cigarette. "Well, it's too bad."

The redhead tossed in her two-bits worth.

"Get down to cases, Joe," she suggested. "This flatfoot is due on duty at four o'clock."

Fay nodded. "Lucky, I want you to call up this dame of yours," he said. "Tell her you won't be on duty for a couple of days, and fix it so she'll square it with your captain. Get it?"

"The hell I will!" I told him. "You're runnin' this party, so go ahead. Only remember you can't get away with it. There'll be a lot of questions asked when I don't show up at four."

Little Joe smiled. "That's right, Lucky, but you forgot—There's always a woman. If we have to drag her down here. . . ." He gave an eloquent shrug, and I knew what he meant.

"Where's the phone?" I said.



THEY showed me, and Little Joe got behind me with his gun.

"Now don't be a louse," he said. "And mess up the girl. It won't do you no good, nor her."

"Okay," I said. "What'll I tell her?" He thought for a minute. "You got any family, Lucky?"

"A brother in St. Louis," I told him. "That'll do," Little Joe said. "Tell her

you heard he's dyin' an' you're flyin' to St. Louis. And Lucky. . . ."

"Yeah?"

"Don't say the wrong thing—understand?"

Karen's voice was husky with relief when I got her on the line.

"Look, Toots," I said. "You know my brother Al I talked about to you? Well, I got a wire he's—say, what's the matter with the line? Sure, I'm talking loud enough. I said my brother Al, y'know, in St. Louis. He's sick, very sick. I'm flyin' back an' I haven't got much time. Can you explain things to the captain so he'll understand? No, I don't know how long I'll be gone."

Little Joe put his hand over the mouthpiece.

"Tell her you'll send her a wire from St. Louis," he whispered.

I did like he said. Karen said: "Don't worry, Lucky, I'll fix it with the skipper."

Little Joe softly depressed the hook. "Now you're being reasonable," he said. He took the instrument away from me, and called in the two hoods from the hallway.

"Come to life, Maimie," Little Joe said to the redhead. "Mix up a round of drinks before I go."

She fiddled around and made four tall ones. I was too mad to drink anything. Little Joe took his time, and when he finished, he set his glass on the window-sill and got up.

"The boys'll keep you company for a couple of days," he told me. "So don't cause them no trouble. I got to run out of town on a little business. See you later."

I knew he was lying. He wanted to pick himself a nice conspicuous place to be seen at the moment these two hoodlums were polishing me off. But this wasn't the right time to call his bluff, so I acted like I took the bait.

Maimie giggled again and looped a silver fox around her neck. Little Joe smiled, and unlocked the hall door.



**CAPTAIN RIVERS** must have been leaning against the door when Little Joe opened it because he catapulted into the room and slugged Joe, all in one blur

of motion. Sam Brace was at his heels and he collared the redhead as she tried to wriggle past them. Then the skipper took care of one punk while I clipped the other. There wasn't a gun drawn.

Little Joe climbed off the floor and slumped in a chair, holding his head between his hands. Captain Rivers glared at the two scared guys for a couple of minutes and finally picked the one whose eyes bugged out the most. He yanked him into the kitchen and shut the door, leaving the rest of us in the living room.

I looked at Sam Brace, and after a moment he grinned.

"Thanks, Sam," I said. "Thanks for changing your mind."

"Your girl friend changed it for me," Sam said. "She sent for me this morning when she couldn't find you and then laid the whole story in the Old Man's lap. Seems he hadn't been satisfied with that Sloane case anyhow, so he hauled me onto the carpet."

"Then you did tell him what we heard, Sam?"

Sam nodded. "Sure I told him. He's square as a die. Said he'd knock Carmichael over himself if he could find one good witness."

There were funny sounds coming from the kitchen. Sam jerked his head towards the door. "Listens like the skipper was getting a witness right now, Lucky."

"Yes," I said. "It sounds like it."

"I was in the skipper's office when you called Karen. 23 was at the curb, so we made it here in under five minutes."

Little Joe lifted his face out of his hands.

"Just out of curiosity, cop," he asked. "How'd you find this joint?"

Sam gave him a dirty look, but I was too high to keep my mouth shut.

"It just happens, Joe," I said, "that I haven't got a brother in St. Louis or any place else. If I had, you can bet he wouldn't be named Al Starr. So my girl caught on that something was wrong and traced the call back."

Little Joe let his head drop back into his hands.

"That just goes to prove my point," he said. "When things break wrong—there's always a woman."



*"By Cripes, you  
diddled them  
compasses!"*

## STARS IN HIS HEAD

By RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

**H**APPILY Sam Browne followed Mr. Jenkins away from the consul's office. Berths in Trinidad were as scarce as comets.

The odor of hospital disinfectant that

hung over Sam Browne's faded khaki trousers, neatly patched shirt and stringy person was still pretty strong. And Sam looked as bleached out as his pants.

The hard hitting Trinidad sun tried to wilt him. But Sam swung his mildewed old suitcase with easy power to show the mate that he had signed on no cripple. Fever was what had laid him low. Mr. Jenkins, a harassed fat man, plainly preferred to suspect drink. Sam Browne had too low an opinion of earthly reputation to object to this diagnosis. He did regret having to sign on as ordinary seaman instead of A.B. There was seventeen dollars a month difference in pay between the two ratings, and an O.S. leads no life of ease in any forecabin.

He had heard on St. Vincent's Jetty queer rumors that the *Beta Perseus* was a screwy ship. But Sam liked her name. The star Beta in the constellation of Perseus was one of Sam's most frequent objects of scrutiny.

Mr. Jenkins looked back out of the corner of his eye at the old brass telescope, like a "Pinafore" property, that was strapped to the side of Sam's cardboard case. But he said nothing. Next instant the mate started, straightened up and looked ahead at a thin, stiff little old man that Sam Browne divined could only be the Old Man.

The Old Man halted abruptly and blasted the telescope with snapping black eyes.

"That's a telescope, isn't it?" he asked the mate, as if sure he was wrong.

Mr. Jenkins repeated the incredulous question to Sam Browne.

Enthusiasm conquered Sam's good sense.

"Yes, sir, that's a telescope," he said, addressing only the mate, as sea etiquette demanded. "A ship in the tropics is a swell place to see stars. Tonight I'm goin' to look hard at Beta Perseus, or Algor, as you know it's called, sir, to see—"

"Tell the man to stow that, Mr. Jenkins," commanded the Old Man crisply. "God help us, sir—"

He drew the sweating mate aside with a quirk of his head and most of what followed was beyond Sam Browne's strained hearing. He did hear: "Education in the foc'sle means trouble all over the ship. You know that; I know that—" Murmur, murmur.

The Old Man strode away, stiff legged, to his boat.

"So ya want to see stars," said the mate.

"Not close to, sir."

The mate gave Sam Browne a bitter glance. Mr. Jenkins had only eight years, five months and eleven or twelve days to go for his pension and he was continually on guard against any base conspiracy, company merger or sudden death that would do him out of that pension.

Going out to the *Beta Perseus* in a shore boat, Sam Browne looked her over. She was an ordinary freight house. Her bow and stern curved abruptly, at the last possible moment, from her broad midship sections. It was plain that the marine architect who had laid her out had been commissioned to get in every last possible inch of cargo space. She wouldn't do better than thirteen knots downhill with a bow like that. But she had been kept up. Her superstructure was white. Her hull was red-lead in patches and black elsewhere.

This close to the ship, Mr. Jenkins looked more worried than he had ashore. His pink face was deeply creased with the sad kind of wrinkles and the corners of his mouth turned down in habitual despair.

As the sweating Negro pulled the shore boat nearer to the *Beta Perseus*, Mr. Jenkins swept the ship with apprehensive eyes. The Old Man was already aboard. Nothing was visibly amiss with the freighter. Only one lighter was alongside; the derricks of Number 5 hatch were whisking aboard the tag ends of the Trinidad cargo.



GINGERLY, as if he expected the Jacob's ladder to fly apart, Mr. Jenkins ascended to the well deck. Sam Browne followed. Once on board, the mate jerked a hand toward the forecabin.

"Get rid o' your duffle and report to the second mate," he commanded. "You'll be in Mr. Lieb's watch."

Sam Browne went aft to find the second mate. He recognized Mr. Lieb. Sam had served under him before.

But Mr. Lieb had changed. Though

he was working Number 5 hatch amidst a swirl of dirt, Mr. Lieb, a square, medium-sized man who looked ten years younger than the fat mate, was clad in impeccable whites and his collar was clean. And he had gone cat-footed, lynx-eyed and incredibly different. Sam Browne noted all this as he saw Mr. Lieb accost, with a faultless salute—a salute, by Peter—the Old Man.

Sam Browne edged in close enough to make out in spite of the clattering winches that Mr. Lieb, in peculiarly polite verbiage, was voicing his doubts concerning the strength of the cargo gear and pointing up at the block at the head of one of the four ton booms.

"Talk to the mate, mister," the captain said crisply and passed on, stiff-necked and unmoved.

"Talk to the mate, sir," Mr. Lieb repeated and looked after the Old Man with a peculiar glint in his eyes. Then he swung around on Sam Browne. The hot fire in his eyes was dying only slowly. He must have recognized Sam but he gave no sign. His face was thin-lipped and mean.

"Report yourself to the bosun," he commanded. "Jump, you!" He turned his back on Sam.

"What's bit him?" Sam asked himself and headed toward the boatswain. Sam had been shipmates with that boatswain before—Bill Thomas, a gray, bent man always three days behind with a shave. Unlike Mr. Lieb, Bill Thomas hadn't changed.

"What kind o' ship is this, where the Old Man comes down on the after well deck while we're workin' cargo?" Sam asked him as they handled hatch covers.

"The kind o' ship you've never signed on before, Sam, an' never will again," the boatswain said. "The kind o' ship where the Old Man is watchin' for the second mate to break loose hell an' all, an' darin' him to do it."

Sam Browne looked the boatswain over, but he didn't seem to have aged much—not enough to be dotty, that is.

"If the Old Man don't like his officer, why don't he fire him or get the marine super—"

Bill Thomas shook his head many times.

"You don't get it, Sam," he said. "This here is a war. Cap'n Jeremiah Elworth is a stiff-necked old wart that would let hell dry up the seas before he'd fire Lieb without good cause. An' Mister Lieb ain't givin' him cause—he's a perfect officer."

"Well, what's it all about, bose?" Sam Browne demanded.

Bill Thomas' voice became mysterious. "This here is a war o' nerves, Sam," he said. "It's drama, that's what it is." He considered this remark. "By God it is drama," he said, faintly surprised. "That's what it is. Drama!"

"Sure it is," Sam Browne agreed, somewhat impatiently. "But what's it all—"

"Give me a chance," the boatswain rasped. "Cripes, listen once!"

He pointed a finger like the horn of a bull at the ladder up which Captain Elworth had ascended.

"Down in Georgetown, which even you ought t' know is in British Guiana, the Old Man made a snappy deal that threw Lieb into convulsions. It was to go alongside a sinkin' British freighter that had made port after bein' shelled an' chased by a submarine, an' transship her cargo before it got wet. The Old Man agreed to drop it at any British port in the West Indies."

"So what?"

"It don't suit Mister Lieb's book. He's a Bund man—a junior partner in the firm o' Hitler & Himmel—though his ticket says he's an American citizen. An' he kicked to the Old Man. Said it wasn't neutral."

"What's the freight, munitions and contrabands?"

Bill Thomas snorted. "Hides, grain an' coffee. One o' these days we won't be able to sail an American ship anywheres except on Central Park Lake. But this deal is with a cargo o' peanuts, legal as a judge."

"Is the stuff still in her?"

The boatswain nodded. "It hasn't been landed here. There's no Britisher due in that can handle it. I figure we'll transship the stuff at Barbados. But nobody's doing any loud talking about where we're headed. A sub might like to know."

"I still think the beach is the place for an officer that—"

Bill Thomas shook his head.

"The Old Man is a proud old goat. His line is he wouldn't kick on Satan H. Beelzebub if he was a good watch officer. He's figured Lieb's game an' he's darin' him to make a wrong motion. An' Lieb—Look at this, now!"



MR. LIEB had sighted the mate and headed toward him. Mr. Jenkins made a half-hearted attempt to get away.

Mr. Lieb cornered him between the break of the deck house and the bulwark and pointed to the cargo block.

"That block's okay," the boatswain growled. "I had the pin out last week. But eve'ybody's goin' to be jumpy about that block an' that could easy kill a man. Look a' the mate!"

The harassed Mr. Jenkins' suspicions were plainly divided between the block and the second mate. Having reported, Mr. Lieb suddenly stiffened into a robot and let his worried superior officer escape. Sweat was streaming down Jenkins' fat, pink cheeks. Mr. Lieb looked up at the bridge deck and with a quick hand screened what seemed like the start of a secret grin. His face hardened again as he felt Sam Browne's eyes on him.

"Goes on all the time," said Bill Thomas. "This here seow is nothin' but a battlefield to the Old Man, a pension to the mate an' an insult to the second mate."

"Nice thing to try t' carry cargo around in," said Sam Browne. "A war o' nerves! You'd say the Old Man is winning?"

"Hands down he's winning."

"Huh!" Sam was surprised. "Lieb wasn't so easy to beat when I knew him. An' right now he looks like he was huggin' a surprise all to himself. Sure he won't shift to a war o' something besides nerves?"

"What d'ya mean?" demanded the boatswain.

Sam Browne shrugged his thin shoulders. Lieb puzzled him.

"It only proves there're better worlds than this one," he said.

The boatswain stared at him. "Got saved? It's years since I heard 'bout you cleanin' up a barroom."

"Earth an' everything on it ain't important enough to get drunk over," Sam Browne asserted. "Me, I've no time to waste on the earth. To blazes with a fourth rate planet like this."

The boatswain looked at him.

"I'm an astronomer," Sam said. "Wars an' ships are just applesauce to me. I take comfort in the stars. They reduce the grief, Bill my boy. Ever hear o' Betelgeuze?"

Bill Thomas scowled at him. "An' don't want to," he said.



THERE was a surprise for Sam Browne and the rest of the foremast hands when the *Beta Perseus* passed out of the Gulf of Paria. Once through the Boca Grande channel of the Dragon's Mouth she turned northwest instead of northeast.

"Huh!" said Sam Browne to the boatswain. "A nice prophet you turned out to be! Not by ninety degrees are we headin' for Barbados! This here is the course to hit the South America track to Colon."

"Courses can be changed at night," Bill Thomas said darkly. "It could be there'd be a sub or commerce raider hangin' out between here an' Barbados. Or maybe there's a limey ship waitin' at Jamaica."

"That's a long way 'round to England," Sam said. He glanced up at the bridge. It was Mr. Lieb's watch below. But he was on the lower bridge, out of sight of the Old Man above, staring ahead. Though his face was stony, there was a hint of a snarl about his lips.

Sam dismissed with an effort an unpleasant interest in worldly affairs. Later he was perhaps unwise. But the night was a tropic night. Every star overhead was like a brilliant will-o-the-wisp beckoning to Sam Browne. They called him out onto Number Two hatch with his old brass telescope.

There was no moon. The occasional puffy trade clouds drifting slowly past merely emphasized the clarity of the



atmosphere in the black void above them. She was still heading about north-west. Conditions were perfect for a man who wanted a squint at the name star of the ship, Beta Perseus, otherwise known as Algol, the Demon.

There wasn't a lot more to Beta Perseus through the telescope than to the naked eye, but Sam Browne got a proprietary glow out of recognizing the star and knowing about it. The easy roll of the ship made it a job to keep the telescope aimed right.

On the lower bridge showed the red glow of the mate's pipe. Mr. Jenkins wasn't getting much pleasure out of that pipe, Sam decided. He was puffing it much too fast; the glow came and went like an electric sign.

But Sam soon forgot the mate. When he came up on deck Beppo, a big A.B. made a prompt attempt to take the brass telescope away from him. With a playful right to the jaw Sam sent him staggering twelve feet to the rail.

Beppo started back. But Sam was stepping with speed and intricacy while his arms licked this way and that like the darting tongue of a snake. And he was still chuckling in a friendly sort of way. Beppo slowed, felt his jaw and stopped. It was a joke. Beppo laughed loudly.

From the forecabin Sam acquired an audience who listened respectfully to him. Sam never had much difficulty in getting along with his shipmates. There was almost always somebody who had heard about that time in Marseilles when, while still interested in such earthly things as cognac, he had knocked down two *agents de police* by heaving a third *agent* at them.

"You're all dumb swabs—an' that goes for officers, too," he told them, "because you ain't got any long range vision. You can't see further 'n next pay day. Now take a look at Beta Perseus. For two and a half days it's bright, like it is now. Then it fades down to about nothin' in less than five hours. It takes near another five hours to get bright again. Why? Because they's a dark star revolv'n' around it, an' when that dark star gets about in front o' Algol—"

He lifted his eye from the telescope and discovered that his fellow star-gazers had faded much faster than Algol. He looked further and made out, near the ladder from the lower bridge, the stiff short figure of Captain Elworth. It wasn't where you'd expect an Old Man to be. But the boatswain had told Sam the Old Man kept watching everywhere since Lieb had turned sour.

Sam Browne ceased his observations. He braced his telescope between two books on astronomy on the hatch and sat down. Captain Elworth said nothing. He ascended the ladder to the lower bridge, spoke to Mr. Jenkins and drew him away from the scrutiny of the well deck.



ANXIOUSLY Sam Browne slid aft, mounted another ladder and reached the boat deck. He glided into safety behind the starboard boat before Captain Elworth and Mr. Jenkins loomed up. Anything having to do with curbing his intercourse with his adopted worlds was important.

The Old Man was at it again about education in the forecabin. It was an old-fashioned idea, but Sam Browne didn't feel like stepping out and correcting the skipper's views just then.

"I don't like it, Mr. Jenkins!" he rasped. "It's not fair to the men and it's not fair to the ship. Education and sea lawyers go together and both are sure to spread discontent. He'll be casting horoscopes and—"

They passed Sam Browne. "I got to go easy on the telescope," he warned himself. "The idea o' thinking I'd cast horoscopes! Bunk! It looks as if I ain't likely to stay in this wagon long enough to flatten down the knobs in my mattress."

He waited till they had left the deck. As he slipped out of his hiding place he discovered that he wasn't alone on the boat deck. A man came out of the shelter of the other boat. When he paused to light a cigarette the cupped flame revealed Mr. Lieb's taut face.

The second mate paced up and down. He stopped now and again to stare at the sky, around the horizon, up at the

zenith and to windward, into the trade breeze out of the northeast. It was a light breeze tonight. Sam puzzled over the dim figure of the queer officer.

Lieb's interest in the heavens seemed intense, but he plainly was not looking at the sky for that release from worldly cares, that dwarfing of the earth, that Sam Browne found there. The officer's scrutiny was sharp and impatient.

All Mr. Lieb was interested in now was weather. And all Sam Browne could observe about weather was that the trade clouds were gradually getting thicker, bunching up and covering his stars. Mr. Lieb was watching this process with attention and, Sam Browne guessed, with approval.

Of a sudden Mr. Lieb flipped his cigarette to the wind and went forward. His walk was jerky. Although the third mate's watch had still two hours to go, Mr. Lieb entered the chartroom. A moment or two later he came out again. Sam Browne, lingering to make sure of an unobserved descent, caught sight of Lieb's vague figure mounting to the monkey's island, above the chartroom, where the standard compass stood.

"That platform's the best place on the ship for a clear look around," Sam Browne explained to himself. "I got to get that guy out o' my mind."

He did not await Mr. Lieb's descent but quietly returned to the main deck. There the boatswain jumped him.

"You been up t' somethin'?" old Bill Thomas accused.

"Wish I knew what it was, bosc," Sam Browne said. He laid a hand on the *Beta Perseus*'s rail. "Seems like you say," he said. "Nobody on this hooker treats her like a ship. Too busy with their own business for ship's business."

"Like you're too busy with stars to bother with her, huh?"

Sam Browne grunted and raised a finger skyward.

"I wouldn't trade you an asteroid for the earth an' all the ships on her," he said. "I've give up the earth. I get along better in the sky."

By the looks of those clouds there would be no more stars that watch. Sam Browne picked up his telescope and star books and went below to caulk off for

a couple of hours. At midnight, as one of Mr. Lieb's watch, he would come on deck for the long gravy-eye trick.



MIDNIGHT was there in no time. It was a cloudy midnight, with the ship snoring along through black water and black air. There wasn't much ceremony about turning over the watch in the *Beta Perseus*. But Sam Browne was surprised to find the lookout he relieved lingering with him in the bow.

"Funny thing," the seaman said. He didn't sound amused. "Lieb's been rampin' round most o' the third's watch. He's even got the Old Man out in his pajamas. When I went aft to relieve the helmsman fr his half hour off I heard Lieb say to the Old Man he felt it was his duty to tell him there's been recent reports from ships o' local magnetic disturbances o' the compass off the Testigos. What's them?"

Sam Browne squinted to remember. "The Testigos is a little bunch o' islands an' rocks about ninety miles from Boca del Drago," he said. "We go north'ard of 'em—give 'em a good berth—if we're picking up the South America-Colon steamer track or bound to Jamaica."

"Islands an' rocks," repeated the seaman. He squatted down in the shelter of the converging bulwarks. "Not so hot on a black night like this. Could the compass disturbance stuff be just a gag to get the Old Man jitterin'?"

"Don't know," said Sam Browne. He cleared his throat. "Magnetic masses o' minerals on the bottom ha' been known to drive a compass crazy in shoal water like this off the Venezuela coast. Usually a small space, though. Never heard of any magnetic stuff here. What'd the Old Man say?"

"Said, 'Your report will be noted, Mr. Lieb.' Say, d'you suppose that was why the Old Man went aft himself for a look a' the patent log? Funny thing. He—"

"Another funny thing?"

"Sure. The Old Man found the rotator'd gone off the log line. Maybe a shark took a bite, huh? The Old Man had the third stream another rotator

(Continued on page 109)



*Opening his shirt,  
he told them to fire  
at his heart.*

# WILD TOWN

A Fact Story

By WILLIAM MACLEOD RAINE

**E**VEN in those early days when El Paso was a sleepy little village a thousand miles from a railroad, the pioneers who had settled there were quite convinced that the town was

marked by destiny for greatness. Across the river on the Mexican side was another small settlement, Paso del Norte, now known by the less euphonious name of Juarez. Most of the inhabitants of

both places were Mexicans, and such business as there was consisted of exchanging supplies for ore with the mining companies of Chihuahua and of selling corn, beef, and flour to the chain of military posts in northwest Texas.

None the less, El Paso was a transportation center. It had no less than four stage lines. The fine Concord coaches of the Overland Mail Company, operating between St. Louis and San Francisco, passed along its dusty main street. Three other lines, connecting with Santa Fe, San Antonio, and Chihuahua points, had here the terminus of their routes.

Though El Paso generally slept in a coma of sunshine, it had its eruptive moments. The pioneers were men of positive, self-assertive characters. Each felt that he had to right his own wrongs; and nearly every citizen carried a six-shooter at his belt.

The center of life in the little town was at the postoffice, managed by "Uncle Ben" Dowell, who operated in the same room a saloon and several gaming tables. Most of the shootings in the early days took place either inside the postoffice or just outside, on El Paso or San Antonio Streets.

W. W. Mills was collector of customs for six years following the Civil War. He mentions in his book, "Forty Years At El Paso," that of the thirty young men employed by him during that time three were killed by Indians, one by robbers, one by a mob, two shot down on the streets, and one ambushed while on a journey. Texas offered its mild excitements.

There was a cottonwood tree growing on the bank of an acequia to which was nailed a bulletin board where men occasionally informed one another that they were liars and scoundrels. Here too the landlady of the boarding house posted her patrons who did not pay their bills.

Difficulties arose between hot-tempered men and were settled promptly. Sometimes those involved were buried after the meeting. The fierce political feuds of Reconstruction days led to impromptu duels among the most prominent citizens, most of whom were ranged for or against the "carpetbag"

administration of Governor Davis. Several of these were shot to death on El Paso Street.

But though there were homicides, no thieves or gangsters infested the town. These arrived with the railroads.

The "Salt Lake War" at San Elizario was more disturbing than most feuds because it involved racial antagonism. This was brought about largely by the obstinacy of Judge Charles H. Howard, a hot-tempered man of impressive appearance who had served as an officer in the Confederate army. The salt lakes had always been recognized as public property, and it was the custom of Mexicans to haul salt from them free of charge. After his election as judge of the El Paso district Howard bought land certificates at Austin and located the site of the deposits.

This aroused intense indignation on the part of the Mexicans, who threatened to disregard the recently acquired rights of Howard. The judge had two of the more prominent Mexicans at San Elizario arrested for inciting riot, whereupon a group of their friends released them and seized Howard. It is likely that he would have been killed but for the efforts of Louis Cardis, an Italian who had gained the confidence of the Mexicans and become their political leader. Howard signed an agreement to give up his claim and leave the state, but as soon as he was out of danger repudiated this on the ground that it had been obtained by duress.

In justice to Howard it ought to be said that he was not the first who attempted to get private control of the salt lakes. Fountain, Mills, Cardis, and the native leader of the Mexicans, Antonio Barajo, had already attempted to gain possession of them by political maneuvering. The judge was merely the boldest of those who saw in the lakes a means to fortune.

Because Cardis was an adviser of those opposing him, Howard became a bitter enemy of the Italian, claiming that the latter was conspiring to have him assassinated. He returned to El Paso, anger boiling in him. Cardis was a sub-contractor of the Texas and California Stage Company, which had its

office at the store of Sam Schutz. He was in the store dictating a letter to Adolph Krakaner, sitting in a rocking chair with his back to the door, when Judge Howard walked in, a double-barreled shotgun in his hand. Warned by Schutz, Cardis jumped up and found cover behind a high office desk. Howard fired at his legs, and when Cardis staggered out sent several buckshot through his heart.

Howard fled to New Mexico and demanded of the Texas governor that Rangers be sent to San Elizario to protect him in his rights. The governor authorized Major Jones, head of the Ranger force, to enlist a company of twenty at El Paso. This was done and Lieutenant John B. Tays was put in command. Relying on the Rangers, Howard returned to San Elizario and put himself under their protection.

His arrival was a signal for instant insurrection. The excitement was intense. Hundreds of Mexicans armed and besieged the Ranger headquarters, where Tays barricaded doors and windows and cut portholes in the walls. The lieutenant refused to give up Howard, and for four days a battle was fought intermittently. A sergeant was killed, as was an American merchant named Ellis. Tays dragged the sergeant back to cover under fire.

Gradually the lines of the Mexicans drew closer. Their leaders asked for a conference, to which the Ranger lieutenant agreed. Bluntly Barelo told Tays that gunpowder had been placed during the night to blow up the building if Howard was not turned over to them.

Tays reported to Howard, who at once decided that he must surrender to his enemies to save the others. He knew that he was going to his death when he and Tays walked out into the mob.

There was a difference of testimony as to the surrender. Some blamed Tays, others John Atkinson, who was one of Howard's bondsmen. In any case the Rangers came out and were disarmed.

The Rangers have always felt that this was the most disgraceful episode in the history of the force. They felt that a strong officer would never have given up as Tays did.

One of the most astounding features of the affair was that Captain Blair of the United States army reached the scene with fourteen men prior to the battle. During the siege he consulted with both parties but refused to take any part in the fight, though there were engaged in it more than a hundred Mexicans who lived on the other side of the Rio Grande.

In his official report Blair said that there were about three hundred fifty sober, determined Mexicans. They meant to get Howard and nothing less would satisfy them. Their anger flamed because Howard, who had killed their friend Cardis, was at liberty, while two of their number had been arrested, fined, and imprisoned only because they said they would get salt law or no law.

After long and stormy debate, during which the firebrands wanted to kill all the gringos and the conservatives only Howard, a compromise was effected. The judge, Atkinson, and McBride, Howard's agents, were condemned to death by the firing squad.

All of them met their fate bravely. Howard was the first. He gave the word to fire. When it came the turn of Atkinson he spoke to the mob in Spanish and reminded them that the party had surrendered under a promise of safety. He was shouted down. Opening his shirt, he told them to fire at his heart. When the bullets struck too low, he kept his feet and flung an insult at the rifle squad.

"Mas arriba, cabrones,"\* he cried. They continued to fire until they had finished him.

There were reprisals later. Five or six Mexicans were slain by the posse which went out to recover the bodies and to arrest the guilty, after which there was a Congressional investigation that produced no results. The Salt War gradually faded out. Both sides were ready to stop.



IT WAS not long after this that four trunk railroads began laying their tracks across the desert toward El Paso. Long before the first train arrived the

\*"Shoot higher, you—."

sleepy little Mexican town was transformed into a hell-roaring American boom city consisting mostly of saloons, gambling houses, dance halls, and variety theaters.

The city marshal was George Campbell and his deputy William Johnson. Keeping the peace in El Paso had now become a sizable job, and the marshal resigned because he was not being paid enough. This left Johnson alone to take care of a town just popping with life. El Paso Street was filled nightly with hundreds of men, and hundreds more were crowding into the gaming establishments to play monte, faro bank, roulette and chuck-a-luck.

On one especially wild night fusillades of shots were fired in the streets and many citizens alarmed. The mayor sent for the Texas Rangers, and for a week five of these long-legged, brown-faced gentlemen under the command of Jim Gillett paced the streets and no murmur of discord was heard. The gamblers and the gunmen had a tremendous respect for this force of quiet but energetic young men. But the Rangers were not enrolled to "ride herd" on towns except during emergencies, and presently they departed.

On the same day there arrived by coach a six-foot-two blond with a handle-bar mustache and a ministerial air. He wore a black Prince Albert suit, a white shirt and collar, and a string tie. Dallas Stoudenmire had come to take on the job of marshal.

He called on William Johnson for the keys of the city jail. Most of the time William was drunk. He declined to give up the keys, whereupon Stoudenmire turned him upside down and shook them out of his pockets.

Almost before a week had passed the new marshal was given his test by fire. Not far from where some cowboys were running stock for the Manning Brothers two young Mexicans were found dead in the brush. The bodies were brought to El Paso by the Rangers and an inquest was held. Johnny Hale, manager for the Mannings, was called as a witness before the coroner. The interpreter was a German named Gus Krempkau.

Evidence seemed to point toward the

cowboys as being implicated in the killings. When the trial adjourned at noon Krempkau was stopped by Hale and accused of twisting the testimony in his translation of it into English. Ex-Marshall Campbell, known to be very friendly to the Mannings, who owned a large variety theater and gambling hall, The Coliseum, ordered Krempkau to retract his interpretation of the evidence. The German refused.

W. W. Mills was standing very near at the time and was surprised at "the low, protesting, almost pleading tone of voice" in which the antagonists spoke to one another. The rangers had gone home for their noon meal, but Stoudenmire was standing near the entrance to the building.

Hale had been drinking and drew his gun, crying out at the same time, "Cut her loose, Campbell." He shot Krempkau through the head and killed him instantly. By this time Campbell had his six-shooter out.

Stoudenmire came into action. His first shot missed Hale but killed a Mexican onlooker; his second sent Hale down, dead. Campbell backed away, his gun smoking. The new marshal dropped him to the sidewalk. He died the next day. Within five seconds of the time of the first shot four men were dead or dying.

El Paso went around on tip-toe for a few days. It appeared that the town had a marshal who could be labeled dangerous. Bad men and thugs walked around him very carefully, eyeing him the way a dog does a large and bristly canine who has just arrived in the neighborhood. Nobody wanted to tread on Mr. Stoudenmire's toes. That did not mean the toughs accepted him gladly. They put up with him until they could find a convenient way of eliminating him.

Meanwhile the marshal went his even-handed way, disregarding the black looks and murmured threats. Some delinquents he arrested, others he beat up. He frequently had to use the keys emptied out of Mr. Johnson in order to toss prisoners into his calaboose. Better citizens, on the whole, were satisfied with Stoudenmire, though they admitted he

was a trifle impulsive with a six-gun. What the West calls "the sporting element" did not share this content. The chief objectors were the Manning brothers and their friends.

Bill Johnson, ex-deputy marshal, was selected as the cat's-paw. He was primed with liquor, flattered and bribed until he consented to stand behind a pile of bricks and pour two loads of buckshot into Stoudenmire as he passed down San Antonio Street on his nightly round.

Presently the marshal sauntered up from the Acme saloon and Johnson unloaded both barrels at him. He scored two complete misses, but he did not live long to regret it. Stoudenmire also fired twice, and made two hits—both vital. The enemy contingent concealed across the road to see the show opened fire on the marshal and hit him in the ankle. He charged instantly, his revolver blazing, and the sporting "gents" scurried away in the darkness like partridges.

A brother-in-law of the marshal, "Doc" Cummings, was shot down in a saloon run by the Mannings, which did not increase the friendliness between them and Dallas Stoudenmire.

Jim Manning was tried for the homicide and acquitted. Under the strain of walking daily with the likelihood of his own sudden death, Stoudenmire took to drink. When under the influence of liquor he became overbearing even with his friends. He was asked to resign, and in his place was appointed James B. Gillett, an ex-sergeant of Company A, Frontier Battalion, Texas Rangers.



GILLETT was one of the best of a splendid force. He was gentle of speech and mild of manner. His blue eyes were as friendly as a June sky, except when they took on the look that meant trouble was impending. Just prior to his resignation as a Ranger he had distinguished himself by a piece of plucky insubordination entirely after the heart of Texas.

Two Baca brothers, Abran and Enofrio, had killed in cold blood the editor of a New Mexican newspaper and had fled to Texas. Gillett decided to get the murderers. He picked up Abran without much trouble and later learned that a

man who looked like Enofrio had been seen in the town of Saragosa, Mexico.

The Ranger sergeant knew that there was no chance of getting the man by diplomatic negotiations. Baca would hear of them and disappear. He decided to kidnap the killer, without the knowledge of his superiors in the service, who could not of course let him cross the line after his man. One of his men, George Lloyd, went with him.

Both of them knew it was a forlorn hope, and that if anything went wrong they would both be shot "into rag dolls," as the Texas phrase was.

Through the bosques they rode to Saragosa. Lloyd held the horses while Gillett stepped into the store where Baca was working. The killer was measuring some goods for an old Mexican woman when Gillett covered him. The ranger backed his man out of the store and mounted him back of Lloyd. They left behind them an excited town. The church bell was ringing, vaqueros were swinging to the saddle, and guns were booming. A posse pursued them to the river ford, firing at them as they rode.

Gillett received a first class lecture from his captain, George W. Baylor, for his imprudence and was sent to Socorro, New Mexico, with the prisoner. The sergeant delivered him, and within three hours a mob had broken into the jail and lynched the murderer. The anger of the Socorro citizens was too intense to keep unsatisfied through a trial. Baca had shot down the editor of the *Sun* in the presence of his wife because he had refused him admittance to a church festival while under the influence of liquor.

After Stoudenmire retired as marshal he was given an appointment as deputy United States marshal with headquarters at El Paso. He was always friendly with his successor, and even when Gillett interfered in a gunfight and arrested him held no grudge. The cause of the trouble was too much liquor.

An ex-deputy marshal named Page had difficulty with another man, and Stoudenmire patched up the trouble and took Page away with him. They did some drinking and later returned to the



Acme saloon to hoist a few more. Page and Stoudenmire quarreled. They drew their pistols. A shot or two rang out. Then Gillett walked into the front door with a sawed-off shotgun and stopped the fireworks by announcing that he would fill full of holes the first one that pulled a trigger again. Next morning the combatants were each fined twenty-five dollars.

But Gillett had already served six years as a Ranger on the west frontier under such noted officers as Roberts, Coldwell, Reynolds, and Baylor. He had fought Indians and bad men as an almost daily diet. The brush country was getting cleared of its outlaws and Comanches no longer rode on raids by the light of the moon. He and Captain Nevill, resigned from the Ranger corps, were running a cattle brand of their own, and it was strongly in his mind to settle down to business on his own account.

The Estado Land & Cattle Company asked him to be its manager, with the privilege of continuing his own herd in Marfa County. While he was hesitating he received a letter from Nevill mentioning that after a man had had more than a quart cup of bullets fired at him as ranger and marshal it was time to get into an occupation less hazardous. Nevill was taking his own advice, and Jim Gillett took it too. He resigned from the force and became a cowman.

When a man looked for trouble on the old frontier he usually found it. Some quiet citizen who seemed inoffensive generally accommodated him. Stoudenmire was becoming a nuisance when he drank. One day he suggested to some friends at the bar that he was going over to the Coliseum to fix things up with the Mannings or to shoot the fuss out.

There were four of the Manning brothers. They owned several saloons and gaming houses. The oldest of them was a doctor, a small well-dressed man, courteous of manner, with a cool, keen eye that overlooked no essentials in an emergency. He did the talking for the family when Stoudenmire arrived and apparently arranged a peace with the marshal.

To show the town that all was now well between them, Dr. Manning and Stoudenmire strolled down El Paso street and dropped in to Ben Dowell's saloon. They were going to seal the compact with a drink. It is not known what Dr. Manning said to annoy his companion, but Stoudenmire whipped out a pistol and fired. As he did so, the doctor caught the revolver by the muzzle and pushed it out of line.

The bullet went through Manning's hand, but he closed with his huge antagonist.

Jim Manning heard the sound of the shot and burst through the swing doors. He sent a leaden slug through Stoudenmire's head that killed the marshal. Since it was clearly self-defence, both of the Mannings were acquitted.



THE next eminent pistoleer employed by El Paso to maintain a reasonable but not too strict order, since the town was known as wide open, was a gentleman named John Selman, who had about a dozen metaphorical notches on his gun.

Measured even by the standards of the Southwest, John was "as tough as they come." It was known that he had spilled a lot of lead in Lincoln County, New Mexico, and more at Fort Griffen, which had once been the headquarters of the buffalo hunters. There was a rumor that en route to the border town he had murdered two sheepherders to appropriate their flock.

Very possibly his lethal record may have been exaggerated, since Mr. Selman had operated under more than one alias and his homicides were generally under cover jobs and not killings done in the light of day for all to see, like those of his more notorious brother assassin, John Wesley Hardin. In any case, the city fathers felt he was bad enough to make a good marshal.

Roughly speaking, they were right. He subdued his native impatience to the placid tolerance expected of a police officer, even while he saw that no law-breaker "put anything over" on him. None of the quiet citizens of the town had anything to fear from "Uncle John",

as in course of time he came to be known, and no gambling house or brothel was allowed to exceed what the marshal considered its proper and reasonable functions, which were of course to fleece the sucker efficiently and more or less lawfully.

When cowboys or outlaws came to town looking for grief Uncle John saw that they found it. One notable instance was the case of Bass Outlaw and some of his friends. Bass was by way of being a part time law officer and a part time law breaker, but he had dropped into El Paso purely for entertainment purposes. He and the boys wanted to see the elephant.

During the evening they drifted into a honky-tonk and began to shoot up the furniture, whereupon Marshal Selman moved hurriedly in that direction. Bass Outlaw saw him coming and tallied first with a bullet in the leg. That was the total score for his side. John kept coming, though several guns blazed at him. When the smoke cleared away Bass Outlaw and two of his companions were ready for an undertaker and the others had vanished.

Meanwhile El Paso was growing into quite a city. It had a baseball team and a ladies' aid society and organizations for civic betterment. The reform element began to agitate against the open town, though those for and against public gambling and legal dance halls were all agreed that regardless of its outward morals El Paso was the finest town in the United States. Even the ministers who inveighed against its wickedness were ready to subscribe to that patriotic article of faith.



ABOUT this time Governor Hogg threw a monkey wrench into the peaceful existence of El Paso. He pardoned John Wesley Hardin from the penitentiary, where he had been locked up for one of twenty-seven or more homicides he had committed.

While in prison Mr. Hardin had seen the error of his ways. He had read his Bible, become converted, and taught Sunday School to the other less bad boys incarcerated. During his spare time—

and he had plenty of it—he had studied law and was prepared to take an examination to practice.

However laudable his intentions, John Wesley found the execution of them not practical. The drag of the old life was on him, and by the time he reached El Paso he was ready to admit he could not reform. The economic life of Texas had no niche into which he could fit.

Though Selman was the ranking "gun-toter" in El Paso prior to the arrival of Hardin, there were others held in high esteem by their admirers. One of these was George Scarborough, a deputy United States marshal. Another was Manning Clements, a nephew of the one and only John Wesley Hardin, and a plenty tough hombre in his own right. Still another pistol artist with a reputation not to be sneezed at was Jeff Milton, erstwhile of Arizona.

With the exception of Clements, who was not in town at the time, all of these gentlemen took a very personal interest in the coming of Hardin. The pardoned convict had been out of circulation a long time since the days when men mentioned him with lowered voices. Maybe he was reformed and had come to hang out a law shingle and to teach a Sunday School class, but these skeptical souls were of the opinion that he would break loose again soon, and if he did he was very likely to turn hostile eyes on them.

None of them relished the thought of an encounter with him, but since they were realists they considered the possibility.

A criminal named McRose was living in Juarez. He was wanted by the state of Texas enough to have had a price put on his head, and one night was indiscreet enough to cross the bridge into United States territory. There somebody pumped lead into him. While under the influence of bad whiskey Hardin talked too much and accused Milton and Scarborough of having killed the man for the reward.

Milton promptly "called" this charge as soon as he met Hardin by demanding that he admit he had lied. To the surprise of all present the notorious killer did not at once slay Milton. He said it

had been the whisky talking and that it was not the truth. As far as he knew Mr. Milton was as innocent as Mary's little lamb.

The years in prison had done something to John Wesley. Apparently he had lost the desire to kill. But he was still not a model citizen. He held up a gambling house and walked out with all the ready cash in sight.

John Selman did not arrest him, and he appeared at his favorite resorts as usual.

The town watched him and Selman with intense interest. There would be trouble one of these days, unless Selman threw up his job and quit, which was an issue that nobody in town expected.

Uncle John said nothing. Since Hardin was doing the drinking, he talked. It is quite clear that he made light of Selman, for he did not take the ordinary precautions of all wary gunmen. Even after the marshal advised him to be ready, Hardin showed no evidence of being aware of imminent battle.

Hardin was in the Acme saloon shaking dice for the drinks when Selman walked into the place and without any warning shot Hardin in the back of the head. The marshal was tried for murder and was defended by A. B. Fall, later United States Senator from New Mexico and Secretary of the Interior during the Harding administration.

Fall got him off by stressing the fact that there was a tilted mirror above and behind the bar, and that Hardin made a motion of his arm that Selman thought was in the direction of a revolver. None the less there was a strong feeling that Selman had committed a cold-blooded murder.

During the trial Fall made references to the relatives of Hardin to which Manning-Clements took exception. He was prevented from killing the lawyer later only by the chance entrance of two Rangers into the room where the men met.

Shortly after this Clements was shot down in the Coney Island Saloon.

Trouble brewed between Selman and Scarborough. The cause of the quarrel is unimportant. Back of it lay the more

important reason that the men did not like each other. Perhaps it was the old story of two notorious bad men, each of whom wanted to be chief, though it should be said for Scarborough that he always was known as a good officer who served the public well.

The grudge between them simmered for a time, then broke into flame one night at the Wigwam. In the alley outside the two men fought. Selman went down after the second shot. There were conflicting stories about this duel, due to the fact that after the battle no revolver was found on Selman's body or near it.

Owen P. White inclines to accept the rumor that somebody had slipped the revolver from Selman's belt before he left the Wigwam. This seems altogether unreasonable to me. Professional gunmen were a cautious breed, and Selman particularly so. Nobody could have "lifted" his gun from him without his knowledge any more than he could have taken the collar from his neck. And nothing can be more sure than that before he left the room he knew that the butt of a six-shooter was close to his hovering fingers. He was not a callow amateur, to take chances on such a vital matter.

In any case, he was buried, and in course of time became a legend. Scarborough walked the streets unmolested and observed by all. He was the man who had killed John Selman, a notable honor among pistolers. A few years later two of the Hole-in-the-Wall gang of train robbers, Will Carver and Kid Curry, shot down Scarborough in New Mexico while trying to escape from a posse. *Sic transit gloria mundi.*

With the turn of the century El Paso shook off its wild and woolly ways. The newspapers and the chamber of commerce stressed the fact that the city was modern and progressive, that it offered great attractions for home seekers. Bad men became merely criminals and went to the penitentiary. Open gambling was frowned upon. Guns went out of fashion and football came in. Citizens who had once garnished themselves with pistols carried golf bags instead. The good old days had gone forever.



*Pop yelled, "Git out  
of the way, son!"*

## "WAR'S WAR, GIRL."

By IVAN MARCH

**I**T WAS Sunday, but all day long there had been the sound of gunfire away over in the west, near the river, where General Grant was fighting the 'cessionists. The cannon made a rumbling noise you could feel as much as hear, and the muskets made a sound like kindling wood catching fire in the kitchen stove of a morning. It made you feel funny—everything so quiet and peaceful all about, with the birds singing drowsily, and then that far-away rumble of the guns.

Pop left the house right after breakfast to preach at Bethel Chapel. He drove the mare hitched to the spring wagon because it hurt him to ride horseback, on account of his gimpy leg he got in the Mexican War. Pop wasn't a regular minister, but when he got religion

after Mom died they made him a deacon in the church and allowed him to say prayers and line out the hymns. Sometimes, when the preacher was away, he'd even preach a little. He could preach right fine when he was steamed up to it.

After he'd gone I cleaned up the breakfast dishes and drove old Bessie, the cow, down to the alder thicket along the creek and tied her up, in case foragers might come along. A week before some Illinois troops had stolen the colt and two days later some Scceesh soldiers from Alabama hooked half our corn right out of the crib. Pop hadn't said much about the colt, because he leaned towards the North, like most of the farmers in our neighborhood. Besides, him having been a sergeant in the regular army during the Mexican War made a

difference. But he'd been mighty mad about the corn.

Pop was bothered in his mind about the war and him not being in it. He didn't seem to think they'd refuse him on account of his game leg, so I guess it was mostly me kept him from trying to sign up with the Union Army. Sometimes I could hear him stumping around on his stiff leg at night, talking to himself and muttering quotations out of the Bible.

When Pop had a mind to do something he wanted to do but wasn't quite sure he ought to do, he'd head for his Bible, and given time enough, he'd find plenty of authority. Same way when he didn't want to do something he knew he ought to be doing. I remember earlier in the spring, when we wanted to go fishing but ought to have been plowing for corn, he turned first crack to the part about fishing in the Sea of Galilee. "Well, that settles it," he'd said solemn like. "Son, dig some worms while I cut the fish poles."



ALONG towards evening I built up the kitchen fire and put on a pot of greens with a hunk of salt meat to cook. I was just getting ready to go down and drive in old Bessie for milking when I saw a cloud of dust up the road and figgered I hadn't better do it.

I was right, too. When the dust thinned a bit, I could see five soldiers, three of them on horseback and two walking. The two men on foot were holding onto the stirrup straps of the mounted men and leading two cows and one little black calf.

They were a mighty rough looking bunch. Their uniforms were so torn and dirty you couldn't hardly tell they were gray, but they all had on hats turned up at the side, with rooster feathers stuck in them.

I threw the milk bucket underneath the house and went around and stood in front of the door. All five stopped at our gate and the two on foot opened it and came towards the house, holding their guns ready. The man in front had a round, red face. He had yellow whiskers all over his chin which stuck out

like the bristles on a scrubbing brush and you could see hair of the same kind peeping out from beneath his ragged hat.

"How'ya, sonny?" he said. "Wha 'bouts is your mammy and daddy?"

"Pop's preachin'," I told 'em. "My mom, she ain't here. She's dead."

"Son, I'm sure sorry to heah," the man said, "I mean 'bout your mammy, and I'm sorry I cain't have the pleasuh of meetin' your daddy, but maybe you could do just as well. Son, wheah you keep the hosses?"

"Pop's driving the mare," I told him. "Some Illinois soldiers stole the colt a week ago."

The red faced man with the yellow whiskers turned to his companion, a little man, dark as an Indian, with a sad droop to his eyes.

"Jess, you heah that? Don't that just beah out what we always said? These damn Yankees ah no bettah'n hoss thieves."

The little dark man raised his mournful eyes,

"Maybe they got a cow, Squire," he said hopefully.

"How 'bout that, sonny?" said the man with the red face. "You ain't got no cow by any chance? Just a leetle ol' bitty cow?"

"No, we ain't got no cow," I told him. "Those Illinois soldiers got the cow, too."

Just then old Bessie down in the alder thicket let out a bawl like she always does when its milking time. You could have heard it a mile off.

"Well, well, now," said the man with the red face. "You tell me! Don't that shu 'nuf sound like a cow?"

The little dark man's eyes brightened. He licked his lips.

"Beef on the hoof," he said. The big red-faced man nodded.

"Yes, suh, some po' little stray cow, 'cause it don't belong to these heah people—they ain't got no cow."



I FELT pretty bad. They found old Bessie and looked through the house, but they didn't take anything except the silver napkin rings which came down from Pop's mother.

They left, driving off old Bessie, and I was mighty glad when, shortly after, I saw Pop coming down the road. The seat in the spring wagon was too low for him and he sat there all hunched over in his black preaching coat and high Sunday hat.

I knew he'd had a good day because he was singing a hymn song in his big booming voice, holding the reins with one hand and beating time to the tune with the other. When he got within shouting distance, I ran out in the road.

"Pop, they got the old cow," I shouted.

Pop stopped singing in the middle of a verse. "What you say, sonny?" he called.

I started down the road, shouting as I ran.

"They got the old cow—five Seceshes. I had her hid in the bottom like you told me, but the darned old fool bawled."

Pop said, "Whoa!" and pulled the old mare to a stop. "Now, son, you just catch your breath and tell me what it's all about."

When I got through he didn't say a thing, but his neck got all red and his blue eyes mighty hard and cold looking. I knew the signs and they meant that he was mad clean through.

I climbed up into the seat beside him and he hit the mare a lick with the reins. His neck kept getting redder and redder and he kept getting madder and madder. When he turned into the barnyard, he handed me the reins and climbed out of the wagon.

"Son, you unhitch the horse," he said. "Give her a double feed of corn and a bucket of water."

He stumped into the house with his head and shoulders reared back like he was leading a parade. After I'd fed the mare and watered her, I went into the kitchen. Pop was in the front room stomping around, talking to himself. I peeked in through the door. He'd taken off his preaching coat and was standing there in his galluses, his Bible in his hand, turning the pages, looking for a message.

"'Cain rose up against Abel, his brother, and slew him'. That ain't it." Pop shuffled a couple more pages. "'And the rain was upon the earth forty days

and forty nights.' That ain't it." And he shuffled some more pages. "'And the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt.' That ain't it."

Pop's neck started to get red. He zipped over a few more pages and then his thumb came down hard on the book. "'And Jehovah said unto Joshua—blow the trumpets—walls of city shall fall down flat.'" Pop put the book face down on the table and stood there just looking at his feet. Then he said, "The Lord done sent me a message. I gotta go."

I said, "What message did He send you, Pop?"

He turned around quick, like I'd waked him up from sleep and looked at me a minute without saying anything.

"Son," he said, "when you're in trouble always go to the Good Book. There's an answer in it for all your troubles. My mind's been mighty troubled, son, but I know my duty now. Yes, sir, writ just as plain as on the Tablets of Moses. Joshua fit the battle of Jericho, didn't he? And ain't my name Joshua? Me, I'm off to enlist with the Union forces."

"Can I go too, Pop?" I asked.

Pop looked at me hard and his eyes got soft. He pulled his beard three or four times before he answered.

"I'm afraid not, son. You ain't old enough. War's mens' work, boy."

"Where am I going to stay while you're away?" I asked. "It'll be mighty lonely around here with you gone, Pop."

Pop took out his big red handkerchief and blew his nose a couple of times loud enough to be heard in the next county.

"That's the hardest part about it, son," he said, empty-like. "Me and you have got mighty close since your Mom died. But I got the message and I've gotta go. We'll go over and see the widow Gage. You're a good, strong boy now and she'll be glad to have you around. Besides, you can kinda look after our place 'till I get back. Won't be more'n four or five months."



I HATED to see Pop go, but next to going with him I liked the idea of staying at the widow Gage's. The widow had always been mighty nice to me. She had

a fine farm about a mile and a half up the road from ours, which she'd inherited from her brother who got drug by a horse and killed. She'd been living there alone running the farm for almost three years, with a couple of Negroes she'd brought with her from Tennessee and turned free.

From what I could see, it hadn't done them much good to get their freedom, because the widow didn't pay them anything except a couple of dollars now and then to buy a new suit of clothes or a dress, which she'd have given them anyway. But the Negroes seemed to coddle to the idea and every time we had church meeting over at Bethel Chapel, they'd turn up with the widow, proud as Punch.

The widow herself was plump, with black hair, red cheeks, and the brightest black eyes you ever saw. She was always smiling and jolly, and every time I went over to her place on an errand, she had a glass of cold buttermilk and a cookie for me. Once she gave me a glass of elderberry wine, but when Pop heard about it, he was mad. He was no teetotaler, but he don't believe in boys drinking until they grew up.

Pop had been courting the widow for the past year, but not getting anywhere. The widow gave him the bright eye like she gave all the men, invited him regularly to Sunday dinner, but when Pop got right down to business, she wouldn't have him. I knew that because I'd heard her say it, at the church picnic, when I went down to the spring to get some water and Pop and the widow were standing there talking.

"No, Josh Springer," she'd said. "Mr. Gage was enough to last me for awhile. Besides, a church deacon around all the time would dampen my spirits. Land sakes alive, I'm getting along fine; but if I ever change my mind, I'll let you know."

I thought Pop would get mad, but he didn't. He just grinned at her in his slow way, his blue eyes shining.

"All right, Mrs. Gage," he said. "When you change your mind, I'll be a waiting—that is, unless a prettier woman comes along." The widow tossed her head and her black eyes snapped. "Sure, men are

all alike, deacon or not. A prettier woman with a better farm and away you'd go." That had been last summer, but Pop was still courting her.

"If the widow will take me in, I'll be mighty happy to stay there, Pop," I said. "Maybe if the war lasts a little longer and I get older, I can come and join up with you."

Pop put his hand on my head. He seemed almost to touch the ceiling, he being a mighty tall, big man, and standing so straight because of his army training.

"The widow'll take care of you fine, son," he said. "She's a good woman."

"If supper is ready, I guess I could eat a bite," he added.

We had the greens and pork and cold corn bread for supper. Pop got out the whiskey jug from its hiding place back of the wood box and had himself a tin cup full. He poured a little more in the tin cup, added water and sugar, and gave it to me.

"You'll be growed up soon, son," he said. "This won't hurt you none. But always remember, never take more than a tin cup full, and take it slow; then you won't get into trouble."



AFTER supper, while I was tidying up, Pop started to pack his things. He got out his old cavalry uniform and tried it on. The coat fitted him pretty tight across the waist, but he couldn't get into the pants. Then he got out my cornet, which he played on sometimes at revival meetings, and started tooting bugle calls. He did it fine.

I went out to dump the dishwater in the barnyard, and while I was standing there, I saw someone cutting up through the back pasture. It was getting dark, so I couldn't see who it was right away, and then I saw it was Benson, the widow Gage's free Negro. He was just hopping along like the devil was after him.

I called into the house, and Pop came out onto the kitchen steps, still dressed in his uniform coat.

"Hey, boy," he bellowed at the Negro. "Where you goin'?"

Benson gave a couple more jumps and



then stopped as if he'd been shot. He looked at Pop, his eyes rolling around in his head and his mouth hanging open. When he saw who it was, his face sagged into a foolish grin.

"Lawd, Mistah Springer," he panted, "you sho gave me a scare. I thought it was one of them sojers."

"What soldiers?" Pop asked. "Come here, boy, tell me what's the matter."

Benson came through the pasture gate, still panting, with his legs trembling.

"Them sojers that done broke into the Missus' house."

I saw Pop's neck starting to get red again.

"Damn their rascally, thievin' hides!" he said. "Benson, you reckon they're still there?"

The Negro rolled his eyes. "Yes, suh, Mistuh Springer. Wuz when I left. Looked like they was fixed to stay the night."

Pop went into the kitchen and came out with the whiskey jug and a tin cup. He poured out a slug and handed it over to Benson.

"Drink this, boy," he said. "Maybe it'll stiffen your backbone." He turned to me. "Son, you and Benson hitch up the mare to the spring wagon. I want you should put the anvil in back and take along your cornet horn."

I said, "Pop, did you say put the anvil in the wagon?"

"You heard me, son, and get a move on before I tan your backside," Pop said.

By the time Benson and I got the mare hitched to the spring wagon and had torn loose the anvil from its block and put it in back, Pop came out of the house still wearing his old uniform coat. He had his old smooth-bore shotgun in one hand, the long-barreled squirrel rifle in the other, his cavalry saber strapped to his waist, and a powder horn slung over his shoulder. He handed the guns up to me.

"Careful there, sonny," he said, "they ain't loaded, but don't drop 'em. Benson, you hop in back there."

The Negro didn't move.

"Whereat we goin', Mistuh Springer?"

Pop swung around on him. "Never mind where we're going. You hop in

back or I'll skin that black hide right off'n you."



BENSON scrambled in over the backboard like he'd been stung by a bee, and Pop climbed up in the front and took the reins. It was dark as black now, with a smell of rain in the air. Pop drove out of the barnyard, up the lane, and turned into the road leading towards the river. We followed the road until we came to the turn up to the widow Gage's place. Her house sat about an eighth of a mile back from the road on a knoll which had a lot of shade maples on it. We could see lights shining in her windows, a bonfire burning in the front yard and shadows passing to and fro in front of the flames. Pop turned the mare's head up the lane and I could hear Benson's teeth chattering back behind us. Pop looked back over his shoulder.

"You stay where you are, boy," he growled. "If you try to run away, I'll catch you and you'll be a whole lot worse off than if the Seceshes had hold of you."

When we got to the foot of the knoll, Pop pulled in the mare and handed me the reins. He hopped out, and he and Benson got the anvil unloaded. Up on the knoll the 'cession soldiers were having themselves a time. The bonfire in the front yard was blazing up high and you could hear them whooping and yelling.

"Must have got into the widder's elderberry wine," Pop said. "Watch out there, Benson, darn your hide. Drop that anvil on my toe and I'll break your neck. Son, you get down out'n that wagon and hol' the mare's head."

They carried the anvil about ten paces from the wagon, set it down on a level piece of ground; then Pop came back to the wagon, got the old smooth-bore and the squirrel rifle, loaded and primed both guns. Then he knelt down and turned the powder horn into the square hole in the anvil, filled it with powder, tamped it down. Load an anvil like that, touch it off, and it will make a noise like a cannon.

"Son, we're going to have a little 4th of July celebration," he said to me. "I aim to shoot off this anvil. Benson here,

he's to fire the two guns and you're to toot like hell on that horn. Understand?"

"Sure, Pop," I told him. "But Benson, he ain't going to fire off no gun. He's gone."

Pop said, "Well I'll be a son-of-a-gun, when did he go?"

"As soon as you laid down the anvil," I told him. "When you stooped over to pour the powder into the anvil hole, Benson he just skeedaddled."

"All right, son," Pop said. "Guess I'll have to put on the whole show myself. Here goes."



HE TRAILED a little path of powder across the face of the anvil, lit a lucifer, touched it to the powder and jumped back. The anvil went off like a six-inch gun. It hopped almost two feet. Pop let out a yell, grabbed the old smooth-bore and shot it into the air.

"Toot that horn, son," he hollered, dancing around on his stiff leg. "Here we go again." And he fired off the squirrel rifle.

I was having a hard time managing the old mare. She was snorting and whinnying and kicking at the singletree, but I managed to get the bugle to my lips and let out a few sour toots. Just about that time Pop fired the anvil again and that was too much for her. She bucked her back, gave a snort, grabbed the bit in her mouth, jerked the reins out of my hands, and started out through the scrub brush along side the road. I yelled at Pop but it was too late. The wagon hit a stump, a wheel came off, the mare broke out of the shafts and ripped away through the underbrush, trailing her harness behind her, making as much noise as a whole troop of cavalry.

Pop stood there a second, looking into the darkness, then he turned around and started hopping up the knoll towards the house, yelling and waving his saber. We got to the top of the knoll just in time to see the three mounted men roll on top of their horses and tear down the knoll in the other direction. The bonfire was burning brightly and it cut a big circle in the darkness, lighting up the front of the house.

Sitting all spread out right in front of the open door was the red-faced Secesh with the yellow whiskers. He had a ham slung over one shoulder, a slab of side meat over the other, and a couple of the widow's silver candlesticks tucked under his arm and I guess a good load of the widow's elderberry wine inside him. When he saw Pop with the saber in his hand, his red hair standing up and his whiskers bristling, the Secesh threw his arms up and started bleating like a sheep.

Pop waved his saber at him and he gave one final bleat and rolled over on his face. Just then the little dark 'cessionist came staggering out of the house, carrying a lot of truck. Pop yelled and started towards him. The little dark man dropped the truck and made a grab for a pistol in his belt, pulled it out and fired so close that the red flame seemed to hit Pop square in the chest. Pop staggered back a step and I let out a screech and started for Pop. The Secesh whirled on me, the smoking pistol in his hand.

Pop yelled, "Git out of the way, son!" His eyes were almighty mean.

He hopped forward and swung his saber at the Secesh, catching him a wallop with the flat of it square on the side of the head. It sounded like when you hit a ripe pumpkin with a club, and the little dark man went down in a heap, his legs twitching.

I was so scared I was choked and couldn't speak. Pop grinned, showing his big white teeth.

"The Johnnie tore my coat," he said, "but never touched raw meat."

He stooped down to pick up the pistol the man had dropped just as the widow busted out of the front door waving a pair of fire tongs. It was a good thing he stopped or she'd have cracked him over the head with them. When she saw it was Pop and saw the two 'cession soldiers she just stood there, her eyes bugged out and her mouth hanging open. She gave a funny little wavering laugh and started to cry.

"Why, Mr. Springer," she said, "why, Mr. Springer." Then she toddled towards Pop and grabbed him around the neck. She was still holding on to Pop

and him looking foolish when I heard horses coming lickety-split up the lane, a lot of them.

"Pop!" I yelled. "Pop! Horses comin'!"

He gave the widow a shove so sudden that she toppled backwards and sat square down on the ground.

"Git to the house!" he shouted. "Git to the house. Them scalawags is comin' back."



BUT it wasn't. It was a whole parcel of Secesh Cavalry. They came up the lane at a gallop, steel jangling, leather creaking, and horses snorting and panting. They had hats turned up on the side and drawn sabers, and the officer in charge had a red sash around his waist. He had a lean, brown face.

Pop just stood there in his old cavalry coat ripped across the shoulder where the Secesh bullet had tore, holding his saber in one hand and the pistol he'd taken from the little Secesh in the other. The officer drew up his horse right in front of Pop and looked at him and at the two Secesh soldiers. His face was mighty stern.

"Take this man prisoner!" the officer pointed at Pop. "Where's the rest of your men, Sergeant?"

"No you don't, mister!" The widow's eyes were snapping. "You let him be. He's just a God fearin', peaceable citizen trying to protect a widow woman from a pack of rascally scalawags. There ain't nobody else."

The Secesh officer's eyes narrowed. "I might ask who was doing all the shooting we heard a few minutes ago, madam," he said slow and polite. "I heard a bugle, too, I believe, and you might explain these two wounded men."

Pop said, "The lady's right, Major, sir. There ain't no one else—jist me and the boy there. No harm done. He blowed the horn and I did the shootin'. We lowed to scare 'em some."

The officer turned and saw me standing there, holding the old cornet in my hand. He shook his head.

"Well, I'll be damned," he said. Then his voice hardened. "If you're a non-combatant you know the consequence of wearing a uniform, carrying arms, and

attacking soldiers, mister. General Beauregard has issued a general order—irregulars are to be shot on the field when captured."

"You can't shoot him! You can't!"

The widow grabbed Pop again. She didn't holler, just kind of whimpered like a hurt thing. I started to blubber a bit, too. Pop pulled her arms apart and patted her on the shoulder. He straightened his shoulders and stood stiff as a ramrod.

"Don't carry on so, Hattie," he said gently. "Don't carry on. No use arguing. I'm just a plain dumb fool. I hadn't ought to have done it. War's war, girl."

The officer looked away and some of his men behind him started muttering. He turned on them, his thin, brown face hard and fierce.

"You, Brown, and you, Tompkins, take up these two wounded men!" he barked. "Tie the prisoner with a lead rope."

They tied Pop's hands behind his back and lashed a lead rope around his waist. One of the troopers hoisted the little dark man up on his horse in front of him, but they had a time with yellow whiskers.

"Major, this heah soldier, he ain't hurted none," the trooper said. "He's jest a mite drunk."

The Secesh officer didn't even smile. He gave an order and the patrol started down the lane to the River Road leading Pop by the rope and I stumbling along after them in the darkness.



WHEN we reached the bottom of the little knoll, the officer dropped back beside Pop. The men rode on ahead, not speaking at all. They were black shadows in the night and the only sound was the soft clop clop of the horses' hoofs on the dirt road.

"You're an old soldier, I take it," he said. His voice had lost some of its harshness and he spoke in that hushed voice people use out-of-doors on a dark night. "What outfit?"

"Sixth Cavalry, Regular Army, Major, sir," Pop said. "Mexican War and a hitch after in the Comanche campaign."

"That would be Worth's command," the officer sighed. "I was with Scott. Wounded?"

"Yep. At Chapultepec. Musket ball in the knee."

The officer drew in his horse and halted the patrol in a little meadow just where the lane joined the River Road.

"Well, we might as well get it over with here," he said. "Corporal Conway, you and Watts drop out. Sergeant Hatch, proceed with the rest of the patrol. We'll catch up with you directly."

The two troopers dropped out and the rest of the patrol filed up the road. Pop and the officer and the two men stood there, not saying a word, until they'd disappeared around the bend. I crawled into some elder bushes, trying to keep quiet with fear and sobs choking in my throat. It was terribly still and quiet.

"Corporal Conway," the officer said softly, "this prisoner was wounded at Chapultepec. He was with the old Sixth—Conway and Watts were with General Taylor at Bucna Vista.

"Remember the fighting at Cerro Gordo?" Popsaid. "Captain Leesneakin' up the mountain in the night behind the Greasers. I kin still see daylight breakin' bright as brass behind them big black mountains and the holler the boys raised when they seen ol' Lee and his boys way up there pourin' it into them Mexicans. Hear Lee's a general now."

"And the fight at Vista," Corporal Conway said. "That was one for the book. I kin hear Ol' 'Rough and Ready' yit. Roarin' and a-whoopin' and layin' about. That was a war. This heah war, hit's jist plumb work."

The officer didn't say anything. Just sat there on his horse, pulling at his mustache. Then, "It's poor shooting light, Corporal—now, if you were to miss, this prisoner might escape."

"I won't miss," the man they called Watts spoke up. "I kin hit a 'coon in the eye any ol' night at twenty paces."

Corporal Conway said, "I reckon you might miss jest a leetle tonight, Bud."

"Well—I reckon I could," Bud said.

There was a rift in the clouds just then and a little pale rind of a moon broke through and I could see Pop

standing there in the meadow resting on his good leg, his head up and shoulders back, with just a ghost of a puzzled grin on his face.

The officer raised his hand. "Fire!"

Both carbines cut plumes of red flame up in the air over Pop's head. The officer pulled out his pistol.

"I reckon I'll have to give him the *coup de grace*," he said and fired his pistol into the air, too.

"Well, that's over," he said. He rode up to Pop and stuck out his hand. "Good-by, soldier. You're dead, you know. At least that'll be my report, and I think Corporal Conway and Trooper Watts agree. You better take off that uniform. It's the wrong color anyway."



POP stood there without moving until the clop-clop of their horses' hoofs had died away up the River Road. I crawled out from behind the elder bushes and ran over to where he stood, half laughing and half crying, and grabbed hold of him. He patted my head.

"Son," he said, "you best go and see if you can find that darn mare. I'll go back and see the widow. She might be a leetle bit uneasy."

I found the mare tangled up in an alder thicket along the creek. She was scratched up a little, but not hurt much. Pop was all steamed up and sang hymn songs all the way home from the widow's. When I'd greased the mare's scratches and put her up for the night, I went back to the house and found Pop in the front room. He'd taken off his uniform coat and was stomping around in his gallses.

"You change your mind about enlistin' Pop?" I asked.

"I don't rightly know, son," he said, making a grab for his Bible. "I got to seek guidance."

He flipped open the book, took one look, and a big smile spread over his face. "Deuteronomy, Chapter 24, line five," he said. "'When a man taketh a new wife, he shall not go out in the host. . . .'" Son, I reckon that settles it. Message came the first crack out of the box. Can't enlist now—leastwise not until we get the corn in and the widow's hogs butchered."

# THE COLONEL'S SON

By GARNET RADCLIFFE



*Sahib, how would you feel were you told your son was to be burned alive—where you could see the thing?*

**H**AS Allah blessed you with a son, *sahib*? He has! Then you are indeed fortunate. Is this his photograph? Ah, he is ugly and puny—a little monkey who will never grow to be a man. . . . The *sahib* laughs because he knows I speak thus slightly lest

my praise should excite the jealousy of the gods. Here, *sahib*, take the photograph again. Speaking thus, with my fingers crossed to avert evil, I tell you he is a fine lad. May he grow up like a young tree, always walking the straight road and fearful of nothing except that which might rob him of his *izzat* (honor).

That is the prayer of a man of the East. We love our sons second only to

our honor. Yes, *sahib*, I said *second*. Better to be alone in your old age than to have your honor blackened.

How would you choose, *sahib*, between the life of your son and your honor, which is also the honor of your regiment and your country? Once I knew a man who had to make that choice. He was a *sahib*, an officer of the Raj. And Fate made it that the life of his only son, who was also an officer of the Raj, lay in the scales against his honor.

He—well, *sahib*, I shall tell you the story from the beginning, and then you can judge for yourself whether he did well or not. It is a story of many years back, when Nazur Khan, the great Waziri chief, ruled Piran and all the country round.

He was a king whose words were like rolling thunder throughout the length and breadth of the Furious Gomal. He had power and riches and a great cunning for warfare. But also he was as cruel as a she-bear, as you will learn presently.

It was in consequence of some act of cruelty of his that the Raj sent the Fifth Sikh Regiment into his territory with orders to burn Piran and other villages. An English missionary had been killed by Nazur Khan's orders and this was the punishment.

I was a stripling in those days and I was one of those who fought under Nazur Khan's standard. Ho, ho! Funny, is it not, to think that I, who draw the pension of a retired Subadar Major, and wear medals given me by the King Emperor, once fought against the Raj! Truly a man's life is a stream flowing in a twisting channel!

We of Piran laughed when we heard that one regiment only had been sent against us. Eight hundred men, and Nazur Khan could number six thousand of the sharpest swords in Asia! We laughed, for in our ignorance we knew not the nature of the regiment that had been sent.

They were the Fifth Royal Sikhs in the Army List, but they had another name also. The Iron Regiment. Aye, and it was a good name. Drill and discipline and the will of the man who commanded them had welded that regiment till it was as one sharp sword.

It was Colonel Fortescue Sahib Bahadur, the colonel of the Iron Regiment, who wielded that sword. *Wah*, he was a soldier and a man in very truth! Do you still breed such men in England today, *sahib*? You do! . . . Then Allah be praised, for the British Raj need be afraid of nothing.

Even though he was such a leader of men, Colonel Fortescue Sahib was as gentle as Nazur Khan was cruel. His Sikhs loved him as if he had been their father. And I think that it was out of that love that their strength had sprung.



THE Iron Regiment! For all his skill in warfare and his numbers, Nazur Khan could not stop their advance. Though in comparison with us they were but a handful, they strode nearer and nearer to Piran, marching through the dust and heat as if they had been machines rather than men of flesh and blood. Two hundred miles eagle-straight across the hills, and when Nazur Khan flung his warriors against them they were like spray dashing vainly against the keel of a great ship. As well might mosquitoes have tried to check a bull! Though time and again we ambushed them and came down upon the column like streams in the rainy season, always they flung us off and marched on.

A regiment of giants. Our laughter changed to wrath and terror after we had learned their strength. Not till they were within five *koss* of the walls of Piran did the advance slacken. Then they pitched camp in a strong place cunningly chosen by Colonel Fortescue Sahib, crouched almost within sight of Piran like a lion about to spring.

They were resting before the last assault. And Nazur Khan was in two minds. Should he risk everything in one great attack upon the camp, or should he wait for their attack and try to hold Piran?

While he was still undecided, Fortune smiled for the first time upon the Waziri cause. A night patrol from Piran took prisoner one of the British officers of the Iron Regiment. They found him almost under the wall of Piran, where he had gone to spy upon our position.

When he found himself surprised he drew his revolver, set his back against a rock and prepared to die hard as a man should.

Had he been a Sikh they would have slain him at once. But he was a *sahib* and therefore too valuable to be killed. Ho, ho! He did not think thus about the men of the patrol. He had brought down two men and wounded a third before his ammunition was exhausted and they could rush upon him from all sides.

Even then they did not take him easily. He was tall and strong and he fought like a young tiger after the fashion of the *sahibs*, striking with his clenched fists at their faces so that men fell senseless. But at last they overpowered him and dragged him bound into Piran.

I was one of those who saw him. A tall *sahib* with hair like ripe corn and a face as smooth as a girl's. Though he must have been eighteen to have obtained his commission, he looked a mere child. But he bore himself like a king and there was no fear in his eyes.

It is not often a *sahib* of the officer caste is taken alive on the frontier, as you know. This young man must have been very brave or very foolish, else he would have reserved the last round for himself before falling into the hands of Nazur Khan.

I watched when they took him to the open space before the chief's watch-tower, where the *durbars* of our tribe were held. He was covered with blood and his uniform was in rags. And though I was a hater of the English in those days, I pitied him for the death that Nazur Khan would make him die.

And then a man in the crowd shouted that he knew who the *sahib* was. This man was a deserter from the Gomal police who had been in Abbotshah where the Iron Regiment was stationed. And he had recognized the prisoner as being the son of Colonel Fortescue Sahib himself.

It was the truth that the deserter had shouted. When they searched the *sahib* they found papers proving without doubt he was the son of Colonel Fortescue Sahib. Barely a year before he had

come out from England to join his father's regiment.

We knew then why he had fought so hard to evade capture. As the son of the colonel of the Iron Regiment, he was a prize Nazur Khan would not have exchanged for fifty of the bravest Sikhs. A lever by which he might force the father's hand. . . .



AND now, *sahib*, do you see the trend of my story? Colonel Fortescue Sahib was the man who had to choose between his son's life and his soldier's honor. His duty was to obey the orders he had been given and sack Piran, but to do so he must sacrifice his son.

That was the choice forced upon him by Nazur Khan. A cruel trick, the *sahib* says—aye, but when is warfare otherwise than cruel? And remember Nazur Khan stood, as it were, with his back against a cliff. He had learned the might of the Iron Regiment and he knew they could scatter his warriors as the wind scatters chaff.

The message he sent under a flag of truce to the Sikhs' camp must have made Colonel Fortescue Sahib wish death had taken him before he had been faced with such a decision. For I tell you, *sahib*, this was no ordinary threat that Nazur Khan had made.

*Sahib*, how would you feel were you told *your* son was to be slowly burned alive in a place where you could see the thing being done? Would any consideration of honor hold you back from saving him? You say that had you been in Colonel Fortescue's place you would have brought out the regiment and stormed Piran! But that would not have saved his son. Even the Iron Regiment could not have marched quickly enough to effect a rescue.

There was no third course possible. Either he must fail in his duty by sparing Piran, or see his son burned alive on a hilltop visible from the camp.

Nazur Khan gave him little time to consider the matter. He acted speedily, for he was afraid of the wrath of the Iron Regiment. He gave orders for a great bonfire to be built upon the hill overlooking the camp. A fire of damp



wood and camel dung that would smoulder slowly, sending up a great column of smoke. I was one of those who helped to carry the wood. And there were others who watched the camp of the Iron Regiment, watching in case the Sikhs should attack.

There was no movement in the camp, but we could see figures of men who looked to where the fire was being built. Then they brought the boy to the spot and tied him to a post where the heat would not reach him too quickly. A great crowd was watching, and when he had been tied Nazur Khan addressed him in a voice that all around could hear.

"Even now you can save yourself, Unbeliever," he cried. "Write a message to your father begging him to agree to my terms, and perhaps your words will soften his heart."

But the boy laughed at him and said, "Nazur Khan, if I wrote thus my father would say I was no longer his son. If you are wise you will light the fire quickly, for the Sikhs will be upon you at any moment."

And, by Allah, such was the dread of the Iron Regiment that many men turned their heads to look down at the camp. But there was no sign of an attack, and Nazur Khan knelt down and set fire to the wood on the side furthest from the post. There was no wind and the smoke rose like a high black pillar.

Did I not tell you Nazur Khan was cruel? He meant to prolong the thing to the uttermost to see if he could make Colonel Fortescue Sahib give way.

Before the fire had reached the boy he sent a second messenger with a white flag hastening down to the camp. He bore the same message for the Colonel Sahib. That he would return his son unharmed if the Iron Regiment spared Piran.

Sahib, what would you have done had you stood where Colonel Fortescue stood and had that column of smoke before your eyes?

You say you would have made terms! Even though doing so stained your honor! Yes, and so should I, though I come of a race whose boast it is that we value our honor above all else.

Love is a cord of which no man can

guess the strength till he tries to break it. And Colonel Fortescue Sahib was but a man and a father.

We saw him ride out alone from the camp to greet Nazur Khan's messenger. As he rode he held his field-glasses to his eyes. He was looking up the hill to where the fire was creeping towards his son's feet like a nest of serpents.

And did he yield? *Sahib*, he did. He waved a white handkerchief, and we upon the hilltop shouted till our throats ached. Piran had been saved; the victory was to Nazur Khan! And some of us shouted too for joy that a brave man, though he was an Unbeliever, had been saved from the flames. . . .



THAT is my story, *sahib*. A man's love for his son lying in the scales against his soldier's honor. You say you also would have done as Colonel Fortescue Sahib did!

Ho, ho, *sahib*, I wonder if you would! For my story is not yet ended. The day after, six thousand of Nazur Khan's warriors stood upon the hills watching the departure of the Iron Regiment.

Six thousand men, armed to the teeth and yet powerless to attack. Terms had been made. The chiefs had sworn not to molest the regiment by oaths no Mussulman could break.

The regiment passed beneath us. Very slowly, as if it were a funeral. Perhaps there were two hundred of the Sikhs who marched upon their feet. But many of those were so weak they could hardly carry their rifles.

The remainder lay in the bullock carts, eight or ten men in every cart. And the camp they had left was like a cemetery, covered with mounds where they had buried their dead by scores. They had buried them secretly under cover of the tents lest we should find out the truth.

There had been cholera in their camp. It had gone through that proud regiment like a fire. Had Nazur Khan known the truth and attacked he would have been opposed by a mere handful of sick men.

*Sahib*, could you have done what Colonel Fortescue Sahib did? Sent your only son, to be taken prisoner, that the regiment might be saved?

(Continued from page 88)

while the second held down the bridge alone. Lieb took the wheel and sent me forrad to the lookout. Lots happenin' tonight."

"Having no log reading will muss up our dead reckoning some but they still got engine revs to check her speed," Sam Browne said. "Anything else happen?"

The seaman stood up, aggrieved.

"What more d'ya want in one watch?" he asked as he departed. "Miracles?"

Sam Browne settled down to the lookout trick. There was no chance that that black void above could draw his attention from ahead, for there was not a star in sight. But the bridge did drag his eyes aft, despite his insulation from affairs of the world.

He managed to make out that there were two men on the bridge. The Old Man was still up, on deck in the gravy-eye watch. It isn't the usual time for the skipper to take the air—the graveyard trick, from midnight to four.

The *Beta Perseus* shoved on through an almost level sea. The northeast trade had dropped off to little more than a breath on the starboard quarter. The water that the stem cut was sullen black, without a light in it, not even a gleam of phosphorescence. When the bow curled the sea aside it turned no more than a vague, hissing gray.



SAM BROWNE stared ahead on the port bow. Off there somewhere would be the unfriendly Testigos. He remembered dimly that the West Indies Pilot book cast doubts on their charted positions and was not over specific about the rocks. There was a variable current here, too. Only a few fishermen inhabited the largest island for part of the year. Sam strained his eyes for the gleam of a fire or a light. He knew Testigo Grande rose high.

Mr. Lieb came out of the wheelhouse in a hurry and spoke to the Old Man in the starboard wing of the bridge. When the Old Man moved it was to go first into the wheelhouse and then ascend the ladder to monkey's island for a look

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at the standard compass. He came back to the bridge, paced to and fro, walked into the wheelhouse and came out again. Restless.

Sam stared ahead and every half hour echoed the bell on the bridge and reported the running lights burning bright.

Of a sudden Sam smiled and his spirits lifted with his head. The clouds above had parted a bit. For an instant he got a glimpse of his admired stars—a few of them. He saw the whole constellation of Virgo, with Spica glowing brightly, and then he saw brilliant Arcturus. He forgot about all the petty troubles of this ship. For a moment.

Then he frowned. His heart gave a sudden jump in his chest. His head felt queer. For the stars were cock-eyed. They were out of place—turned wrong in the sky. Spica—the whole constellation of Virgo—was far up in the northern sky—further north than Arcturus.

"I've gone screwy!" Sam muttered. "They're all out o' place!"

He grabbed the bulwark. But he wasn't dizzy. Feverishly he figured it out. The ship's course was about northwest. North would be broad on the starboard bow. That was right. And that was about where he'd seen Spica, almost to northward of Arcturus.

"I ain't gone screwy!" Sam muttered. He swung around, heedless of his duty as lookout, and pelted aft. He flung himself down the ladder to the well deck, rushed across it and clattered up the ladders toward the bridge.

Mr. Lieb met him at the top of the ladder, blocking off the way.

"We're headed south, sir—near due south!" Sam gasped. "I just seen Virgo—we're headed south!"

"All right!" said Mr. Lieb. His voice was low and soothing. "Back to your lookout, man. Get!"

"What's this?" It was the Old Man thrusting his head past Mr. Lieb.

"The man's—" Mr. Lieb began but Sam Browne interrupted:

"Virgo, sir—Virgo an' Arcturus. Just saw 'em through the clouds, an' we're headed south, sir. Compasses can go wrong—but not stars, sir. We're headed south!"

From the vantage point of the bridge the Old Man stared down at Sam in a grim and threatening silence. Then he lifted his eyes briefly to the overcast sky. It was the only concession. Sam gripped the rails of the ladder and waited.

"He might be right, sir," Mr. Lieb murmured, with a sardonic edge to his voice. "Local attraction may haf affected the compasses. Shall I change course?"

He had turned toward the Old Man and stood rigid, head projecting forward in his effort to see his commander's expression.

For a moment longer the Old Man did not open his mouth. Then he spoke in an inflectionless tone.

"Send the man back to his station, Mr. Lieb."

"But, sir—" Sam Browne appealed. "I'm no nut, sir. I know the stars, the constellations. I've studied 'em for years. I know 'em like you'd know your face. An' I saw Spica plain—"

"He might be right, sir," the second mate said in his murmurous voice. "As I called to your attention, sir, the compass—"

"Send him back, Mr. Lieb, and tell him if he wants to hold a berth on this ship he'd better come down to earth."

The Old Man's voice was icy in its finality. He turned away.

"South is how she's headed, sir," Sam Browne said loudly. He heard the Old Man's footsteps, short and quick, and full of doom as he walked to the other side of the bridge.

"Down or I boot you down!" said Mr. Lieb and he spoke through his clenched teeth. He added a volley of deep, guttural curses. The anger in his voice took worried Sam Browne by surprise. It raised the hair on the back of his head.

Sam started up the ladder, eyes fixed wanly on Mr. Lieb's legs. He knew how to handle a kick. But suddenly he stopped. It was his lowly position on earth—Sam Browne, ordinary seaman—that halted him. If he jumped and flattened the second mate the stiff-necked Old Man would slap him in irons. That wouldn't alter the course. He was head almost due south. Sam

Browne tramped back across the well deck. It could be that the Old Man knew—"No," Sam decided. "How do I prove it to that balky old dodo before—"

By the ladder to the forecandle head Bill Thomas was waiting for him.

"Who went poundin' aft across the foc'sle just now like a winch gone adrift?" the boatswain demanded. "Was them your feet overhead that jolted me out o' my sleep?"

Sam Browne clutched at him.

"That was me, bosc," Sam said. "Call me anything you can lay tongue to, Bill, but get me my telescope out o' my bunk. Headin' south, an' the Testigo rocks to suth'ard! I got reason to look out! Get it, Bill!"

He wrenched himself clear of the boatswain's clutch and clambered up onto the head. His gaze searched the black water that lay flat and unrevealing before the slicing stem of the ship. If he could make out a light, a swash of gray foam where a beach or reef disturbed the calm of the sea, he might save her from driving down to quick destruction. He hadn't quit.

He lifted frantic eyes. If the clouds would only open up a little! The Old Man back there on the bridge needed only a glimpse of the wheeling constellations to set him right, compass or no compass.

Yet the Old Man had told him to come down to earth. That was the ironical part of it. Only the stars could save the Old Man and his ship, and he talked about coming down to earth.



BACK on the bridge the Old Man was pacing to and fro faster than ever. Maybe he was looking at the sky.

Bill Thomas came up and thrust Sam's telescope into his hand. But Sam, though he grasped it automatically, did not use it to sweep the vague horizon.

He was leaning over the bulwark now, staring into the sea just a little ahead of where the bow of the *Beta Perseus* ripped into it. And it seemed to Sam now that the black sea was no longer flat, that it was in motion, churned into life by a rising bottom or confin-

ing reefs. Fretful waters run shallow.

Yet the back of his brain warned him that these were fancies, that his eyes saw nothing but a dead sea ahead, that fear alone was stirring those black waters.

He set down the telescope against the base of the bulwark.

"What's up?" demanded the boatswain.

"Down to earth!" Sam muttered, with another glance at the overcast sky. "What good's—"

And then he stopped. He stood suddenly rigid, facing to port. He was seeking with a sense other than vision an earthly confirmation of that star-pointed southerly course.

"South!" he muttered. "South! That would put it on the port hand!"

To him came his scrap of earthly evidence, a mere ghostly breath of fact.

Instantly he thrust past the boatswain, who was still asking questions, and raced aft again. He moved faster this time, much faster, sped by the fear that that stirring water ahead might be no product of panic but real shoaling seas. Across the well deck, up the ladder, up to the bridge. The boatswain trailed him, alternately venting questions and warnings.

It was the Old Man himself who stood at the top of the ladder this time, the Old Man, with stern threat in the dim loom of a stiff, motionless little body. Close beside him was Mr. Lieb.

"Sir!" gasped Sam Browne. "I'm down t' earth! If we're headin' northwest where's your trade wind comin' from? Did y'ever hear of a trade comin' out o' the west?"

"Get forward, you—" Mr. Lieb stopped to watch the Old Man. Captain Elworth had suddenly swung around. He stepped out further onto the bridge.

The ship was making about twelve knots and the trade wind that night was a mere zephyr. But the Old Man was a sailor. His leathery cheek, tough as it was, sorted out in taut seconds the eddies set up by the superstructure, felt the apparent wind and reckoned the true wind. He did it as fast as Sam Browne had done it, and Sam, on the ladder, felt again that draft of air from

the port side. Below him Bill Thomas was muttering.

The Old Man got it fast. The northeast trade wind might swing north or down past southeast, but north of Venezuela in normal trade weather it would never come out of the westerly quarters. And here was a breeze—

"Bosun!" snapped the Old Man. His eyes were on the queer water alongside. "Get me a sounding! Jump! Mr. Lieb! Get forrad! Stand by the anchor! Take this lookout with you!"

He reached for the engine room telegraph and rang her down.

"Right! Hard over!" he cried to the helmsman.

Mr. Lieb came down the bridge ladder in two jumps. He shoved aside Sam Browne, who was tangled with the boatswain, and pelted toward the forecabin head.

At his heels Sam Browne followed. Not till he was up close to the anchor windlass did he see it—something vague, blacker than black, looming out of the sea. Sam rushed up into the eyes of the ship. It was either a big rock well away or a little rock close at hand. Sam couldn't tell. Whatever it was, it thrust up out of the unquiet sea. She was just beginning to swing. There would be other rocks.

He wheeled to hail the bridge, his arm pointing.

Mr. Lieb swung around on him and hit him hard on the chin. There was something heavy in his fist.

Sam Browne had taken plenty of those but never a blow so unexpected. With his cry unuttered he went down. He went out.



WHAT brought him back was the sound of Mr. Lieb's voice, cursing him. It was a queer thing, that, a weird thing, that rage-shaken voice, cursing him so softly, so close to his ears. Again it raised Sam Browne's hair on his head. Here was an emotion all the more dangerous because it was selfless, fanatical.

He was jammed up in the eyes of the ship with his head on his telescope and the second mate was down on his knees

beside him, waiting. Waiting for what? Waiting to club him if he yelled, waiting for this ship laden with wheat for soldiers' bellies and leather for soldiers' shoes to crash into an iron shore. Men, Mr. Lieb's own shipmates, could die in a wreck, but that meant nothing in his embittered brain.

Sam Browne's hair kept prickling. He remembered Mr. Lieb's quiet trip to the standard compass up on the monkey's island. He remembered Mr. Lieb's taking over the wheel and wheelhouse alone while the Old Man and the third mate were aft, streaming a new log line.

Sam Browne lifted his head off the telescope.

"By cripes, you diddled them compasses!" he said.

Mr. Lieb swung. But this time Sam Browne knew the thing in Mr. Lieb's fist was coming. He rolled, scrambled to one knee and lifted the telescope.

In the darkness Mr. Lieb swung again. And Sam Browne was too intent in landing with the telescope to have too much care for his aching jaw. The telescope thudded down. But all the fireworks in the world blazed in one single instant in Sam's brain. He shook his head in a desperate effort to clear it. He was wavering on his knees. He crawled laboriously over Lieb's limp form. He got to the anchor windlass and fumbled with it in slowly growing consciousness.

The anchor chain roared out through the hawsepipe. Sam Browne sagged to his knees as the anchor took the ground. The ship brought up, grinding against the chain. He didn't hit.

Footsteps scuffled; men cried out to each other; flashlights stabbed the black air. Sam Browne didn't move. He was muttering softly. Somebody put a hand on Sam's shoulder.

"All right?" It was the Old Man's voice.

"All right!" Sam repeated bitterly. "All right? Look at it!"

He lifted in shaky hands his telescope, his bridge to better worlds. There was a bend in it like the curve of a chain shackle.

"Look at it!" he said. "I've seen plenty stars tonight. But I'll never see no more through that!"



BEHIND his desk the Old Man looked tougher and stiffer than he did on the bridge.

"I won't have education in my foc'sle, Browne," he said. "I won't have it!"

The ship was shuddering on, past the Testigos, holding course till orders came to turn to some West Indian port. Aft in the ship's hospital, which served for brig, Mr. Lieb, if he felt anything like Sam Browne, was nursing his head. But Captain Elworth was all business and his eyes demanded a reply from Sam Browne.

"I'll get another ship, sir," Sam Browne said soberly. "But my education's not likely to hurt anybody. It's all about other worlds than this. I gave this one up a while back."

"I'm not interested in the mental fumbblings of a young fool," the Old Man said tartly.

With a pencil he tapped a book on his desk. He cleared his throat and his voice was dry. "I won't have education in my foc'sle. You will start here, at Page 63, the question, 'What is a bottomry bond?' and study to Page 69, the question, 'If a loss is sustained when a vessel at anchor is fouled by another vessel does this come under general or particular average?'"

The Old Man cleared his throat again and spoke severely: "You understand, sir, that this study for your ticket will in no way exempt you from any of your duties as acting third mate. But learn you shall. I will not have education in my foc'sle; neither will I have ignorance on my bridge."

"Me, sir?" stammered Sam Browne. "Acting third?" His voice shook. "Why, sir, I quit hoping to get aft a long while ago, about the time I found it was comfortin' to watch old Orion go wheelin' around the sky, not botherin' about little guys with cock-eyed ambitions—"

"Stars are handy things to navigate a ship by," said the Old Man. "It is time for you to come down to earth—and stay there."

The Old Man thinned his lips grimly. "I think I will be able to arrange it. Pages 63 and 69. I'll hear you on it tomorrow."



# THE CAMP-FIRE

*Where readers, writers and adventurers meet*

**A**T THIS Camp-Fire we welcome two newcomers to membership in the Writers' Brigade. Their names are familiar writing names in numerous quarters, but each now makes his first appearance in our pages.

First we'll take up Leslie T. White, who at this moment is in South America and in the southernmost city of South America, by the Straits of Magellan. In his account of himself, he has touched only here and there in the wide field of his experiences and travels. He says:

I left school at 14 because of restlessness. I spent several futile years trying to get adjusted, during which time many different occupations were attempted. Among them were machine shop work, truck driving, book-keeping, mechanical drawing. Then at 17 I joined the Ottawa Cameron Highlanders because of a war scare that seemed to herald action and in the Scottish Regiment I learned boxing and after discharge fought a few uneventful professional fights. I then traveled with a carnival as the "plant" in the audience so when the regular circus pug challenged the rubes to take on all comers, I stepped out of the audience as one of the local boys.

The nearest thing to orthodox business was with the E. B. Eddy Company. I worked up to assistant purchasing agent, but it didn't agree mentally or physically and I left. Then I went up to the northern timber country as an assistant government scaler. Eventually the habitant country of northern Quebec began to pall so I drifted south and west—New York, New Orleans, El Paso and finally to southern California after which I had a very brief business career with the Standard Oil Company.

After that I was a ranger for a large private land holding. The next ten years of this law enforcing experience is covered in my autobiography, "Me, Detective" published in 1936 by Harcourt, Brace. The ranging was followed by an appointment as a criminal deputy sheriff in Ventura under "Red" Bob Clark, famous western sheriff.

Leaving the Ventura Police Department with the rank of inspector, I entered the District Attorney's office of Los Angeles as Chief Identification Expert for the Bureau of Investigation. During the next three to four years I was engaged largely in investigation of homicide and gang work, crimes of violence and so forth—leaving this in 1932 to take up writing professionally.

I have had about 2,000,000 words of fiction published, which includes two books now out—"Me, Detective", before mentioned, "Harnessed Bull" published in the Spring of 1937 by Harcourt, Brace and "Homicide" being published in the fall of 1937 also by Harcourt, Brace.

My interests are boating and animals. When I first came to California I spent a lot of time at Gobel's African Lion Farm, but after my friend and advisor, the trainer, was torn to pieces by his cats, I transferred my interest to smaller animals, in which realm a Scottish terrier known as Sandy predominates. I have a large hawk, known as Genevieve, which I'm attempting to train for falconry.

In 1936 I was appointed a special deputy United States Marshal by Bob Clark, my former sheriff, who is now United States Marshal for Southern California.

**I**VAN MARCH is a pen name. It hides the identity of a well-known Western lawyer. He explains that while law is his



profession, fiction is his hobby, and a pen name helps him to keep the two halves of his life apart.

I was born just before the turn of the Century in Southern Ohio, and in time to see some adventure in World War No. 1. Served with the First Marine Aviation Force attached to the British Northern Bombing Group in Flanders, as a pilot, flying unprotected day bombers in bomb raids on German submarine bases and ammunition dumps. After the war returned to college and after graduation spent a year in the iron mines in Northern Minnesota and steel mills in Youngstown, Ohio. Studied law and spent several years as a Government prosecutor and Assistant District Attorney. Now live in Pasadena, California, where I manage to get in occasional hunting and fishing trips to Mexico and Arizona. There is more kick in landing a two hundred fifty pound marlin swordfish on light tackle than there is writing about it.

My chief reading hobby is the history of the settlement of Kentucky and the Northwest Territory—perhaps because my great-grandfather came through the Cumberland Notch with Daniel Boone. His name was John Martin. Old John and another pioneer hill-billy were out gathering wild plums one day—for no good reason, I suspect—when a war party of Shawnees from Shawneetown at the mouth of the Scioto River snuk up on them.


I am married and have three children and a Cocker Spaniel named Oscar. Since the outbreak of World War No. 2, Oscar wants to change his name to Pete.

IN reading the *Caradossos* yarns of F. R. Buckley, it's astonishing to note some of the parallels between what went on in Europe five hundred years ago and what goes on today. Leaders, and alarmists, and causes for wars—nothing much seems to have changed except the way men trim their whiskers. Buckley gives us here some notes of background for the novelette "Red Is the Blade."


Gianni Mola, like other characters in these stories of Luigi Caradossos, represents an authentic type. The latter part of the Renaissance period in Italy, which saw many nobles become *condottieri*, or captains of mercenary troops, also saw the reverse—*condottieri* becoming nobles. Most famous of these was, of course, Francesco Sforza, who threw down a peasant's mattock to join a passing

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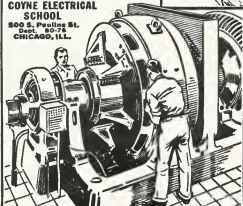
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cavalry troop and came to be ruler of Milan.

But there were minor examples of the same process—commanders hired by nobles whose ambitions exceeded their political abilities, taking over lands and lordships in lieu of payment when the ambitions failed. The equivalent in modern times would be the taking over of a bankrupt civil dictatorship by the Army; which has happened in Europe much more recently than the XVI century, and which may well happen again.

Aside from *condottieri* actually hired (as Gianni in the story claims to have been) there was a plague, in both Italy and France, of unemployed soldiers gathered into irregular bands and known ominously to the country-folk as "shavers" and "skinners". My own view of Gianni is that he was a borderline case—who had probably picked up the trick of having scapegoats for his atrocities from that prototype of dictators, Cesare Borgia.

History provides several examples of Cesare's use of this device, which Machiavelli called "beautiful", and which nowadays we know as a blood purge.

Cesare had one in the year 1500 and another—that which Machiavelli admired so much—at Sinigaglia in 1502.

Perhaps you might like to hear the story of those, some time?

ONE old mystery of Africa—drum messages—met an explanation in a book review by Lewis Gannett in this morning's paper. The book is "Ten Years in the Congo," by Dr. W. E. Davis. The explanation has been touched on in our pages before (in fact, it is the basis of a yarn H. Bedford-Jones wrote for us in January that will appear in a month or so) but the actual happenings interested us enough to tear the paragraphs from the paper. Here they are:

For other native crafts which seemed sheer magic the doctor acquired the keenest respect; for drumming, for instance. The language of the Congo drum, he says, is something more than a Morse code. It imitates in sound and rhythm the effect of the human voice. Every native child learns the language of the drum early as he learns to speak. One night when the doctor was talking with the natives in his own house they suddenly paused, listened intently, then told him that the chief of a native village twenty miles away had died. "We have just heard it on the drum," they said. He listened; his West-

ern ears could not catch a sound. If a villager whom he wanted to see was off in the forest, some other villager would "call him on the drum," and soon he would appear.

One Belgian official, on arriving in the Congo, was skeptical of drum stories. He tested the chief of Imono thus: "I want you," he said, "to send a message on your drum to the chief of Etata and tell him to send me immediately four chickens, two ducks, one goat and twenty-seven eggs. Also, two arrows and a broken spear." Etata was seven miles away. The drummer tapped his drum; in amazingly quick time the precise quantities asked appeared. And, the official said, he had posted soldiers along the path to make sure that no runner carried the message by word of mouth.

IT'S good to hear again from our old friend, Colonel George Chase Lewis of the U. S. Infantry. Those who know him know of his many exploits in the Philippine fighting and elsewhere, and his great interest in firearms. Colonel Lewis saw something in *Ask Adventure* about the explosion of plugged guns, and we're glad that has set him to talking.

I was much interested in the letter of Mr. Henry Lose of Philadelphia in April *Adventure* on the subject of blowing up of gun barrels when fired with an obstruction in the bore, and the reply of Mr. Donegan Wiggins thereto. I must say that from a mathematical standpoint Mr. Lose makes a very strong argument for his skepticism about such destructive explosions, but unfortunately he fails to go deep enough into the ballistics and pressure problems to allow for wedge action and the enormous increase in pressure when the expansion of the burning powder gases is checked for even the smallest fraction of a second. I do not think it would interest your readers to go into the ballistics of the matter, but I will say that the cold practical facts of such damage are unrefutable. I have campaigned and hunted on three continents and have had eleven years overseas service and I have built and operated some of the largest United States Army rifle ranges and naturally I have seen many instances of such barrel obstruction damaged guns.

It is routine instruction given to every Army recruit and repeated day after day on the target range that men must look through their barrels before going up to the firing point, but in spite of all precautions bore-obstruction accidents continue to happen. It is a standing order that tampons will not be

put in rifle muzzles to protect the bores from dust, sand, and rust, but the temptation to keep out grit in sand-stormy weather is so strong that men will use tampons in their muzzles in spite of all orders, and every so often a man forgets to remove the tampon and blows up a barrel. In 42 years active service I have personally examined a couple of scores of guns wrecked by being fired with tampons, cleaning rags or mud in the barrels.

My earliest and most lucky experience was with my first rifle, a .22 caliber heavy barreled affair when I was ten years old. I jammed a cleaning rag in the barrel and bent the ram rod trying to drive it out. Then we boys tried burning the rag out with red hot rods. This was a slow process and finally I adopted the advice of the man of all work on my father's place and shot the rag out. Luckily I used a .22 short cartridge and the barrel and breech was of very heavy construction. The rag was blown out, the breech was a spring locked mechanism which opened up under pressure but did not break, and I got some powder burns on my arms and my trigger finger was badly wrenched by the recoil, but the gun itself was not damaged. This taught me to be shy of shooting out rags. Later I had a much more expensive target gun as a high school boy, a .22 caliber Quackenbush, and I loaned it to a friend who quacked back the gun with a wrecked breech and said he had tried to shoot out a cleaning rag. He had the luck or the wit to pull the trigger with a long string.

My last personal experience was while hunting ducks near the Malaig River, Lake Lanao, Mindanao, with a Remington auto loading 12 gauge shotgun. This is Moro country and though at that time we were nominally at peace with the recently conquered tribesmen, yet there was always the lure of gun stealing, and murder was a routine matter if it meant a successful gun theft. The tribal feuds were in full sway and the possession of a gun by a rival dato, or native noble, meant success or failure—life or death, to him and his following. White men with guns always had to be on the alert and travel in groups. Soldiers tied tin cans on their guns at night to give the alarm if a naked, oil coated gun runner sneaked by the sentry in darkness. Several strange local Moros, unarmed apparently, joined our party all smiles and eagerness to show us where game was located and to retrieve dead ducks.

In the tangle of high swampy growth I suddenly found myself separated from my party and with only one strange native with me, who had a most insistent series of excuses to get within grasping distance of my gun. Though he was apparently unarmed,

they are clever at concealing blades in their hair or breach cloths and I warned this over-friendly native very firmly twice to keep his distance. We were nearly waist deep in water and lilies and lotus. As a flock of birds arose around me and I threw up my gun, I noted with the tail of my eye this Moro crowding in on my flank and I pivoted to the left and swung my barrel down through a mass of vegetation and covered him so that he put on brakes hard about four feet from my muzzle.

I was well convinced of his hostile intent, both from his third violation of my instructions and his savage looks, but I did not want to shoot an unarmed man without more proof. So I gave him another chance and made him strip all his clothing and shake out his long hair and showed him my pistol in my shirt front, which he had not seen before. That Moro was quite useful thereafter. Months later he frankly told me he had engineered the separation of me from my party and had planned to get me mired in the deep mud and water plants and drown or overpower me for my gun. His father and brother were in debt to their dato and had been enslaved, and this gun would have freed them. Just as I was getting my Moro under control two big mallards came down so close that it looked like they were going to bite me and I cut loose, firing over my Moro's head so close that he thought I was going after him and he dived and stayed down so long that I thought he would drown. He could not swim in that tangled vegetation and finally came up exhausted and defiant a couple of yards from where he went under, and I had him retrieve my birds.

Then I looked over my gun and found a swelling in the barrel as big as a hen's egg about three inches back of the muzzle and my day's hunting was over. Of course, there was no obstruction left in the barrel by the time I discovered the damage, but as I reconstructed what had occurred, when I pivoted and stuck my barrel through the reeds and lotus to check the Moro's rush I got a twig or leaf in the muzzle and when I fire a couple of minutes later my barrel simply swelled up. The obstruction was not tight enough to cause pressure for a complete rupture but that Remington steel was very very tough and swelled until the bore was more than 1 1/4 inches in diameter without a single crack or seam.

On the target range near Fort Thomas, Kentucky, I was commanding a skirmish line advancing at the double time, dropping and firing as the targets bobbed up. One of the men slipped and I thought his muzzle went into the ground as he dived to the ground. I yelled at him to watch his muzzle but the

targets came up and he fired before I reached him. His Krag barrel was split six inches near the muzzle and the wooden stock underneath was splintered and he was hurt in both hands.

Again at Fort Brady, we had had a lot of trouble with men using unauthorized tampons to protect bores against blowing sand on the range. One man had been given fatigue twice for having tampons in his muzzle. I heard a very dull heavy report as this man fired and went over to his firing point to investigate and he claimed a defective cartridge and that he had been badly kicked. His shot scored a miss. On examining his gun I found a clear pressure ring about 3/4 inch from the muzzle. This ring was very shallow and the swelling was hardly perceptible on the outside of the barrel. It was enough to spoil the accuracy of the gun which in a vise gave a dispersion of more than 2 feet at 100 yards.

I saw a 30-30 barrel in my hunting camp at Rexford, Mich., which had been wrecked an hour before by a civilian guest who lay down on a big log across a small stream and reached down at arm's length, holding the rifle like a pistol, shoved the barrel into the water with an idea of overcoming the refraction of the water while shooting a large trout. His face and body were protected by the log but his arm and hand were badly burned and he was disabled for a month, but he escaped permanent injury. His companion fished the gun out of the clear water and brought it to camp. The barrel was swollen and split in three strips lengthwise for several inches and the breech was badly loosened up.

**D**ONEGAN WIGGINS, *Ask Adventure* gun expert, has had some good letters lately on this same matter of bursting barrels that caused Colonel Lewis to write. Here's one from a soldier who got the steel splinters in his eye, face and arm, and Mr. Wiggins' theory of what happened.

Re the letter written you by Henry Lose, Philadelphia, and your answer, if Mr. Lose wishes further proof of what can happen to a rifle barrel under certain circumstances, refer him to me. I can furnish him absolute proof as to what happened, through copies of Special Orders, War Department, copy of my medical record from the Adjutant Generals Dept., and copies of my medical record from the files of the General Hospital, Army of Cuban Occupation, 1906-1909, the Army Hospital at Washington, D. C., and the Eye & Ear Institute, New York City.

The accident happened while we were engaged in target practice on the target range at Guanajay, Cuba, on December 1, 1907, and in a way the accident differs from anything either you or Mr. Lose mention. I was shooting from the 300-yard firing point. Had fired my five shots slow fire, reloaded and was firing the five shots rapid fire. The first four shots went all right.

But the fifth bullet only went approximately one-third of the length of the barrel and stuck there. The resultant explosion broke the rifle in two at the small of the stock, one sliver coming back under my right arm and penetrating the big muscle. The sidewalls of the magazine bulged out approximately a half-inch, which in a way was a lucky thing as it prevented the bolt coming back and probably taking the side of my head with it. The floor plate of the magazine went into the ground to a depth of eighteen inches.

I forgot to mention that the barrel also had quite a split in it. You can imagine what happened to me. My face was full of splinters of steel, one entering the right eye. By the way, it is still there.

Strangely enough the right eye which is the one injured and with the steel still in it is stronger than the other eye.

W. M. Kartzmark,  
Phoenix, Arizona

Dear Mr. Kartzmark,

I have a theory in your case, which may be either correct or otherwise. My guess is that either a tiny ring of brass was detached from the muzzle of the case, and rode the bullet forward a slight distance, and then remained lodged in the bore, or else the bullet jacket broke at the crimping cannellure, if there was one, (I seem to recall seeing some very old .30 Model 1906 issue stuff with this feature) and remaining in the bore, either of which possibilities would raise Merry Hell with the pressures of the next shot.

Donegan Wiggins

**A** MONTH ago we did a lot of Camp-Fire talking and misgiving about the Army's Garand semi-automatic rifle. Another piece of gun gossip reaches us.

The Army having adopted again the obsolete 150-grain Springfield cartridge because the gas-operated Garand generates troubles with the 172-grain bullet, we hear that our effective range of machine gun fire on land and in the air is reduced from 4200 to 2400 yards.

H. B.

# FOOT ITCH

## ATHLETE'S FOOT

Send Coupon  
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According to the Government Health Bulletin No. E-28, at least 50% of the adult population of the United States are being attacked by the disease known as Athlete's Foot.

Usually the disease starts between the toes. Little watery blisters form, and the skin cracks and peels. After a while, the itching becomes intense, and you feel as though you would like to scratch off all the skin.

## BEWARE OF IT SPREADING

Often the disease travels all over the bottom of the feet. The soles of your feet become red and swollen. The skin also cracks and peels, and the itching becomes worse and worse.

Get relief from this disease as quickly as possible, because it is very contagious, and it may go to your hands or even to the under arm or crotch of the legs.

## HERE'S HOW TO RELIEVE IT

The germ that causes the disease is known as *Tinea Trichophyton*. It buries itself deep in the tissues of the skin and is very hard to kill. A test made shows it takes 15 minutes of boiling to destroy the germ; whereas, upon contact, laboratory tests show that H. F. will kill the germ *Tinea Trichophyton* within 15 seconds.

H. F. was developed solely for the purpose of relieving Athlete's Foot. It is a liquid that penetrates and dries quickly. You just paint the affected parts. H. F. gently peels the skin which enables it to get to parasites that exist under the outer cuticle.

## ITCHING OFTEN RELIEVED QUICKLY

When you apply H. F. you may find that the itching is quickly relieved. You should paint the infected parts with H. F. night and morning until your feet are better. Usually this takes from three to ten days.

H. F. should leave the skin soft and smooth. You may marvel at the quick way it brings you relief.

## H. F. SENT ON FREE TRIAL

Sign and mail the coupon, and a bottle of H. F. will be mailed you immediately. Don't send any money and don't pay the postman any money; don't pay anything any time unless H. F. is helping you. If it does help you, we know you will be glad to send us \$1 for the bottle at the end of ten days. That's how much faith we have in H. F. Read, sign and mail the coupon today.

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P. P.

819 Perdido St., New Orleans, La.

Please send me immediately a bottle of H. F. for foot trouble as described above. I agree to use it according to directions. If at the end of 10 days my feet are getting better, I will send you \$1. If I am not entirely satisfied, I will return the unused portion of the bottle to you within 15 days from the time I receive it.

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## ★ THE TRAIL AHEAD ★



Georges Surdez writes "—But a First Class Fighting Man." A first class fighting novelette of the Foreign Legion, wherein a corporal too tough for peace, too wild in war, draws wisdom from bayonets and grenades in a blockhouse raid.

In the same issue—

"Drums Do Talk," a story of an African trader and murder in a dugout by H. Bedford-Jones; "Bush Telegraph," a story of Australian trails and trackers by Albert Richard Wetjen; "High Pressure Area," Westmoreland Gray's stirring story of trouble on an oil field; another instalment of Luke Short's "Spy of the North"; a war aviation yarn by Loring Dowst, a torpedoed ship story by William Breyfogle and others.

These, and other valuable departments and fact pieces will be in the August issue of

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# ASK ADVENTURE

*Information you can't get elsewhere*

**THIS** motorcyclist ran into the Maginot Line (beg pardon, Monsieur!)—now he's bound through Central American jungles.

Request:—I'm planning a motorcycle trip through Central America—if such a trip is possible. I've journeyed through a major portion of Europe just prior to the present war, astride a Zundapp, and managed to ride into adventures that put many fiction stories to shame. However, the Central American trip seems to present difficulties more difficult than armies mobilizing behind and ahead of one; commandeered gasoline stations padlocked temporarily; fist fights and battles royal due to license plates identifying one as from a particular country (I bought my motorcycle in Germany, and as a student of Heidelberg was issued the letter "D" (for "Deutschland") which by international law had to be affixed to the license plate.)

What has puzzled me is the "wet season" that travelers speak of in such weird tones. The wet seasons seem to hit the several Central American countries at different times.

Can I make such a trip in July? Can I pass through Mexico and Central America on roads that are fast enough to make the whole journey in a month? Can I get a freighter back from Panama to some point in Florida or possibly New Orleans, and have you any idea as to the cost of such a sea trip?

I am extremely interested in the Mayan ruins. How about roads leading to them? Are there any such?

Will I get shot for dragging a camera along through these countries? (I've had all the trouble I intend to have because of my camera. I spent too much time arguing with members of the Sureté National in Metz, France, after having snapped a picture of a shell hole and a cross in a territory that turned out to be the Maginot Line.)

Do the gasoline and oil sold in Central America differ from that sold in the United

States sufficiently to cause carburetor trouble? (I've experienced too much of that, too.)

Are hotels situated close enough in Central America to hit one each night? I'm aware that that's a silly question, but I'm asking in order to see what type and quantity of duffel to take along.

I am planning on starting from Texas, where I'll buy a motorcycle.

—Robert L. Wharton, Dayton, Ohio.

Reply by Mr. Robert Spiers Benjamin:—A motorcycle trip through Central America? Well, you're right, it's a bigger problem than making a European trip. For rather than having man-made difficulties of armies, passports, etc., all your dangers and inconveniences—or most of them—will be natural ones.

South of Mexico City, the roads through Central America are extremely vague, and often non-existent. From Laredo to Mexico City is, of course, a matter of only a few days. From Mexico City southward to the Guatemala Border the road is pretty bad. The rainy season is, roughly, from July through October, and in that season most of the Central American paths are very muddy, to say the least. In any other season you can probably get through. The connecting point of Mexico-Guatemala is Ayutla, where roads lead down into Guatemala City. From Guatemala City to El Salvador, and San Salvador, the capital, is a matter of only six or seven hours over a fairly good road, and one of the most completed links in the Pan-American Highway chain.

After San Salvador, I'm stuck on what to advise you. There have been expeditions made through the wilderness trails on horseback (Tschiffley's Ride) and on a motorcycle, once, and several times on foot road ("Vagabond's Paradise" by Alfred Batson, probably in your library.) But it is lots more than a month's trip; you'll have to struggle through the jungles and carry an extra sup-



ply of gas and oil. Perhaps I had better not be at all encouraging about making the entire journey!

With luck and push, however, you can make the trip from Laredo, Texas, down to San Salvador without much danger, and have plenty of interesting scenery (especially in the Guatemalan Highlands.) You could make the whole trip in about three weeks, and then load your cycle on the Central American Railroads at San Salvador station for the long trip back to Mexico City, or better still cycle back to Guatemala City for the last part to Mexico City by train. From Guatemala City, shipping your cycle on train to Puerto Barrios, Guatemala, you could catch a United Fruit boat to New Orleans, about \$65.

Regarding the cost of such a trip? It shouldn't be too expensive, although gasoline is fairly expensive down in the banana lands (25-30 cents a gallon). On the way to San Salvador you can plan on hitting certain towns and finding a place to sleep. There will be very few luxurious hotels and, anyway, you probably won't be interested in them. If you speak a bit of Spanish you can always get shelter in some peon's shack for a few centavos, and have some tortillas in the A.M. Watch out for the water (take Halazone tablets) and don't eat uncooked vegetables (you probably learned this in Europe.)

From Mexico City your route will lead you southward through Taxco, Cuernavaca, down through the State of Oaxaca, to the Guatemalan border town of Ayutla, thence Quetzaltenango, Solola, Antigua and Guatemala City. I nominate the section of Guatemala, just mentioned, as the most beautiful part of this globe of ours! Take plenty of color film!

And regarding cameras, you'll have no trouble with them if you don't try to take pictures of military activities and if you merely mind your own business. Re Mayan ruins, you can see some of the Mayan civilizations in the Guatemalan Highlands around Chichicastenango and Quetzaltenango, but the real ruins are in the Peten area, and inaccessible to any but a real explorer with several additional weeks' time.

The gas and oil sold down there will probably do all right for your motorcycle, but take the proper filters along on your carburetor.

Luck! and fast traveling.

**A**IRPLANE wing shapes, landing speeds and other big questions.

Request:—I'd like to know the answers to the following questions.

1. Why is the leading edge of an airplane wing curved down?
2. Why is too much landing speed undesirable?
3. What is a method of reducing landing speed?
4. What is an outside loop?
5. What is the function of a super-charger?
6. What is an observation plane?
7. What are the types of propellers?
8. How are monoplane wings braced?

—Walter Pajdowski, Cliffside, N. J.

Reply by Major Falk Harmel:—Leading edge of wing curved down. It has been found by long experience that some curvature and some thickness are essential if the properties of a wing are to be good. When a moving stream of air encounters a wing, part of the air passes above and part passes below. This sort of air flow, the stream of air separating smoothly at the leading edge of the wing and joining again at the trailing edge without much disturbance, is known as the streamline flow. The natural tendency of the air to pursue a straight path instead of following a curved one as it passes over the wing means that the portion of it on the upper side is constantly pulling away from the wing, while that on the lower side is pushing against it. As a result of this action the air above the wing is exercising what may be said to be a partial suction on its upper surface while that below is exercising an additional pressure on the lower side. The pressure of air against the upper surface of the wing is then less than the normal atmospheric pressure, while that on the lower surface is more. The result of this is that the moving air tends to pull upward on the upper surface and to push up on the lower.

2. Too much landing speed is undesirable for quite a number of reasons. Unless a field is perfectly smooth—no ruts and no obstructions—a plane rolling along the ground at high speed is apt to nose over when striking such rut or obstruction, with resultant injury to occupants and damage to plane. Some landing fields are limited in size, and planes with high landing speed could not be landed with safety thereon. The lower the landing speed the more chance or certainty there is for a safe landing.

3. Landing speed may be reduced by utilization of flaps on trailing edge of wings. These flaps are adjustable, that is, their position is controlled by pilot.

4. Outside Loop. The airplane starts its first climb from an upside-down position on the bottom of a loop, when lift is minimum. A dangerous maneuver, which has only been executed safely by the most skillful pilots.





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## FLY tying for a fishing bug.

Request:—I am a converted fly-caster. That is, I used to be a bait caster, but after several years of casting and reeling in with no result, I said to hell with it and traded my casting rod for a fly rod, bought a good line, a reel, and started to learn the gentle art. Now that I am fairly proficient at it, I begin to have a yen to tie my own flies.

I have looked over a few material catalogs and their prices make the fly-tying hobby, what with special vices, threads, wax, pliers, varnish, etc., etc., pretty much of a rich man's game.

I've done most of my fly fishing with a wet combination fly and spinner for bass and pan fish. Do you need an elaborate outlay for tying that sort of fly? Are plain ring-necked pheasant feathers all right? What fly-tyers manual do you recommend? Could I use chicken feathers, dyed. What kind of dye, what process? Is beeswax okay for a tying wax?

If I buy a guinea for the feathers, how shall I go about skinning it and preserving the feathers? What do you think about a tin or brass minnow on the order of the pippins wobbler with a hank of Bucktail, white, and a feather tied on the hook?

—F. W. Carroll, Columbus, Ohio.

Reply by "Ozark Ripley" Thompson:—There is a magazine, or at least there was one, called the Swapper's Friend, published at Saline, Mich. Maybe it will help you out on the kind of trade you want.

The best hook for your purpose is "Fly Tying for Beginners." Probably you can get it from a book store in your city or from *Field and Stream*, New York City. I think the price is one dollar.

Write E. H. Peckinpugh, Chamberlain Bldg., Chattanooga, Tenn., tell him what you have to swap and he may trade you some fly tying material.

You can use ordinary hooks for your purpose, as you just want two wing feathers and a chenille body. You can dye chicken feathers or goose feathers, the white ones of course, with any color diamond dye and they will hold color. You only need an ordinary gy tyer's vise for your flies. Beeswax is okay. Use ordinary chenille for bodies and gilt. The best hooks are not reaching this country at present to any extent on account of the war. Tackle firms declare there is a scarcity of them. The best are made by Mustad, in Norway. They took the trade away from the English makers.

As for a fine metal minnow, the type of the Pfueger Pippin, I think you would surely kill the action with a bucktail or feather tail. You would have to have a small spinner in front to attract. Watch out on this as Pfueger has lots of patents on these things.

Cut down from back of head straight down back of guinea, cut strip so legs will come out evenly, and tack on a board in shelter to dry. You can use a lot of a guinea and most ducks, especially the grey duck feathers, for Professors, etc. Most wing feathers are used for dyeing to make large flies like your spinner flies are, then they are trimmed in shape with scissors. You ought also have some Amhroid or similar cement for your covering of the tie. Most of this stuff is made by dissolving ordinary celluloid in acetone.

You can make most standard patterns with a small supply of feathers. You can get the hackle feathers at poultry dressing plants for nearly nothing. You can strip or work them back with your nails or a knife to make the hackle you wind around when you complete the fly.

## DUCKS make 60 m.p.h.—a duck hawk dives at 180.

Request:—I have looked through all my books to find some data on the speed of bird flights and can find very little. This is the best I can get: swifts clocked at 100 miles per hour; European hawk 110; golden plover, ocean flight estimated, 200 miles per hour; the fastest for ducks—60 miles per hour.

It seems to me that I've read of ducks going faster than that. How are these speeds arrived at? Airplane?

—G. S. Morrison, Ottumwa, Iowa.

Reply by Mr. Davis Quinn:—To accurately measure the flight speed of a bird is no easy matter. The most reliable method is to follow the bird with an airplane with air-speed indicator, but in most cases this is impossible because the stalling speed of most airplanes is higher than the maximum flying speed of all but a few species of birds. The slow flying birds may be rated by automobile speedometer, or clocked between two ground points.

It has been estimated that a peregrine when striking its prey attains a speed of 150 m.p.h., and an aviator relates that on one occasion he was diving at a flock of ducks at 175 m.p.h. when a hawk (probably duck hawk) passed him as though the plane were standing still and struck one of the ducks!

Birds with rapid wingbeat appear to fly much faster than birds with a longer wing and slower beat, an interesting optical illusion. Swallows seem to fly therefore faster than they really do, and a black-headed gull with deliberate wingbeat easily kept pace with a golden plover whose fast strokes made it look to be going faster than the gull.

As you do not ask for specific information, I am somewhat at loss to answer. There is as you undoubtedly know a good deal of literature on the subject of flight speeds of birds, but I do not know of a better publication than Cir. No. 428, FLIGHT SPEED OF BIRDS, 1937, which you may obtain for five cents from the Supt. of Documents, Washington, D. C.

<i>Bird</i>	<i>M.P.H.</i>	<i>Timing Device</i>
Golden eagle	120	watch
Duck hawk	180	stop watch
Golden plover	60-70	train
Whistling swan	55	airplane
Mallard	58	airplane
Europ. teal	68	airplane
Canvasback	72	airplane

There has always been considerable controversy over the speed of wild ducks. The scientists claim that duck speeds have been very much exaggerated, but on the other hand very few veteran duck hunters will agree to this. As an example of the difference between these two schools, I cite the above maximums as a scientific exhibit, and from the book of Dr. Bruette, DUCK, GOOSE & BRANT SHOOTING, I cite the following,

Blue- & Green-wing teal	80 to 100 m.p.h.
Canvasback	80 to 120 m.p.h.
Redhead	80 to 90 m.p.h.

F. C. Lincoln, Associate Biologist of the U. S. Bureau of Biological Survey, has said that "I am satisfied that almost all observers and writers greatly over-estimate the speed of birds . . . The old Curtiss training plane, presumed to have maximum speed of 80 m.p.h. had no difficulty in overhauling and flying through flocks of ducks which we may safely assume were exerting every effort to escape."

The swift is probably able to accelerate to 100 m.p.h. or more, and it is my opinion that on a straightaway this little bird is the fastest of all, the duck hawk attaining its terrific speed in a stoop analogous to the power dive of an aircraft.

Your figure for golden plover at 200 m.p.h. is unadulterated fiction.

I should say that 60 is a safe maximum for teal.

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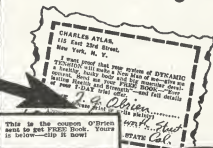
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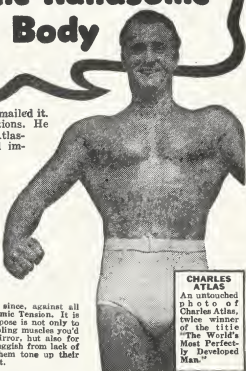
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